

‘They Fought as Bravely as Any American Fighting Men’:
Conservative Republicans and the Attempt to Save American Exceptionalism
from the Loss in Vietnam, 1975-1991
by
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ABSTRACT

The historiography of the Vietnam War's effect on American society and culture often focuses on the public image of its veterans. Historians and other scholars credit liberal and apolitical Vietnam veterans for reshaping Americans' opinions of those who served. These men deserve significant recognition for these changes; however, historians consistently overlook another aspect this topic. Conservative Republicans in the mid-1970s through the early 1990s made a concerted effort to alter how Americans viewed Vietnam veterans and their performance in the conflict. The few scholars who have examined this issue suggest conservatives wanted to quell Americans' distaste for military endeavors after the loss in Southeast Asia, a concept known as the Vietnam Syndrome.

This dissertation argues conservatives' efforts were more complex than simply wanting to break down the syndrome. The war and its loss threatened their understandings of the exceptional nature of the United States. This notion of exceptionalism stemmed from the immense success of the country territorially, economically, and in the international system, accomplishments realized with the assistance of the American military. The performance of the military establishment and its soldiers in the Vietnam War and the negative international and domestic opinions of the country in the wake of this loss threatened those elements of American success that conservatives viewed as imperative to maintaining the idea of exceptionalism and the power of the United States. As a result, a disparate group of conservative Republicans in the post-Vietnam era attempted to alter American understandings of the nation's martial tradition and the concept of martial masculinity, both ravaged by the war. This

dissertation adds another layer to the historiography of the effects of the Vietnam War by arguing that conservatives not only shored up Americans' belief in the martial tradition and reshaped the definition of martial masculinity, but that they also significantly influenced Americans' newfound positive opinions of Vietnam veterans.

Dedicated to the memory of

My beloved grandmother

Frieda Marie Andreä Steele

July 16, 1891 – December 7, 1981

and

My cherished uncle

Lloyd Norman Stevens

November 19, 1922 – August 27, 2011

For all of my ancestors whose hard work afforded me opportunities they never had
themselves.

I also dedicate this to those who lived the story of the Vietnam War; those who served,
perished, suffered and continue to suffer on both sides of the conflict. Regardless of our
nationalities or viewpoints on the conflict, our shared humanity unites us.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

On May 28, 2012, President Barack Obama spoke at the Vietnam Wall in commemoration of what the U.S. government deemed the 50th anniversary of the Vietnam War.¹ Standing at the monument, a symbol of a war that left a deep scar on the United States, Obama echoed the sentiments of many Americans, especially veterans, who struggled during the 1980s to change the negative image of those who served in the war. The young president, who was only a child when Saigon became Ho Chi Minh City, empathized with the Vietnam Veterans, praising their valor for serving honorably only to have their service reviled or ignored by the American public.²

However, Obama's words turned sharply from a simple commendation of the men who fought in the war toward a justification of why they deserved such accolades. "All too often it's forgotten," remarked the president, "that you, our troops in Vietnam, won

¹ Readers should bear in mind that American military intervention began in the region much earlier than 1962. However, the date May 28, 2012 marked the beginning of a 13-year program to commemorate the half-century anniversary of the war. "Presidential Proclamation: Commemoration of the Vietnam War, Press Release from the Office of the Press Secretary, May 25, 2012." <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2012/05/25/presidential-proclamation-commemoration-50th-anniversary-vietnam-war>. For a discussion of American involvement in the region before this date see Mark Bradley, *Imagining Vietnam and America: the Making of Post-Colonial Vietnam, 1919-1950* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); George Herring, *America's Longest War*, 4th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2002), 1-129; and Fredrik Logevall, *Embers of War: The Fall of an Empire and the Making of America's Vietnam* (New York: Random House, 2012). For background information on the Vietnamese perspective of the lead up to the Vietnam War, see David G. Marr, *Vietnam 1945: The Quest for Power* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995). Good primers on the Vietnam perspective during the war include William J. Duiker, *Sacred War: Nationalism and Revolution in a Divided Vietnam* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1995) and Troung Nhu Tang, *A Vietcong Memoir: An Inside Account of the Vietnam War and its Aftermath* (New York: Vintage Books, 1986).

² "Remarks by the President at the Commemoration Ceremony of the 50th Anniversary of the Vietnam War, May 28, 2012," <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2012/05/28/remarks-president-commemoration-ceremony-50th-anniversary-vietnam-war>.

every major battle you fought in.” He suggested they suffered a poor image for years because of the “misdeeds of a few.” He highlighted their achievements abroad and lauded their accomplishments at home after war, building to an emotional crescendo: “So here today, it must be said—you have earned your place among the greatest generations. At this time, I would ask all our Vietnam veterans . . . to please stand . . . as we say those simple words which always greet our troops when they come home from here on out: Welcome home . . . Thank you. We appreciate you. Welcome home.”³

The tone and language of this speech, given thirty-seven years after the fall of Saigon, largely reflected of the efforts of Vietnam veterans across the American political spectrum who worked for decades to gain proper recognition for their service.⁴ Veterans who helped memorialize their comrades through the Vietnam Wall sought recognition of reintegration issues and fought to gain respect and honor for the duties they performed for their country. Yet, upon closer examination, the language of Obama’s speech also paralleled a style of rhetoric used during the 1980s by many conservative Republicans who hoped to change the public’s perception of a war that signified the country’s first military defeat.⁵

³ Ibid.

⁴ Veterans of all political persuasions participated in efforts to change Americans’ opinions of Vietnam veterans and their role the controversial conflict. These efforts ran the gamut of press campaigns, literature, monument creation, parades, and political participation. A listing of historical literature on this subject can be found as references throughout this dissertation, but an excellent overview of the efforts of veterans can be found in Gerald Nicosia, *Home to War: A History of the Vietnam Veterans Movement* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2001). However, it is important to note that Nicosia mainly focuses on the efforts of liberals, Democrats, and non-political participants.

⁵ Historical literature on conservative efforts to change the memory of the Vietnam War has been limited to works connected to the Reagan administration and its role in the creation of the Vietnam Wall, as well as the president’s campaign to re-assert America’s military and political strength after its diminishment from the loss of the war. Works with an emphasis on conservatives and the creation of the Wall include Patrick Hagopian, *The Vietnam War in American Memory: Veterans, Memorials, and the*

Obama's speech reflected the reality that the Vietnam conflict had created a national trauma that had political, cultural, and foreign policy reverberations for decades. The physic wounds of the war affected the public's mood in a multitude of ways, as did the painful embarrassment of its loss.⁶ Outside of the United States, questions over the prosecution and the loss of the war corrupted the perceived prestige the United States had solidified for itself during World War II.⁷

In conservative Republican circles, the war fused with issues of civil rights, women's liberation, and the sexual revolution to create what conservatives deemed a crisis of American identity and traditional values.⁸ The crisis widened after Watergate, bringing even some moderate Democrats into the fold.⁹ The election of Ronald Reagan in

Politics of Healing (University of Massachusetts Press, 2009). Works with an emphasis on the campaign to re-strengthen America during Reagan's terms include Michael Schaller, *Right Turn: American Life in the Reagan/Bush Era, 1980-1992*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007) and *Reckoning with Reagan: America and Its President in the 1980s*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

⁶ For a discussion of the psychic wounds caused by Vietnam see, George Herring, *America's Longest War*, 4th ed. For a discussion of the turbulence of the decade of the 1960s see Maurice Isserman and Michael Kazin, *Divided America: The Civil War of the 1960s*, 4th edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011) and Terry H. Anderson, *The Sixties*, 4th edition (Boston: Pearson, 2012).

⁷ As George Herring suggests in *America's Longest War*, Vietnam "discredited and crippled the military, at least for a time, and temporarily estranged the United States from the rest of the world," 346. German political scientist Helga Haftendorn pushed this idea further stating that "high on the Reagan foreign policy agenda was the need to reinvigorate alliances and work together with friends around the world. It was part of the Administration's credo that America's partners expected strong leadership and that some of the misunderstandings and problems of the past had originated in the very absence of such leadership," i.e. Vietnam. Helga Haftendorn, "Toward a Reconstruction of American Strength," in *The Reagan Administration: A Reconstruction of American Strength?*, eds. Helga Haftendorn and Jakob Schissler, (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter and Company, 1988), 17.

⁸ For an excellent discussion of the rise of the "New Right" in relation to the turmoil of the 1960s see, Dan T. Carter, *The Politics of Rage: George Wallace, The Origins of the New Conservatism, and the Transformation of American Politics*, Second Edition, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2000), 294-323.

⁹ In 1968, many Democrats had already moved away from the party as a part of a targeted demographic group identified by Republicans. Nixon's administration lumped disaffected Democrats in with white, ethnic and blue-collar members of the working class (regardless of their political affiliation in what its aides and the president termed the "silent majority." Although Watergate sent many Democrats

1980, who ran on a platform of the regeneration of American values and strength, suggested that many Americans either agreed or simply tired of change.¹⁰

The Vietnam conflict also created the Vietnam Syndrome; a reluctance of the American public to support future military interventions. The more martial-minded and conservative members of the Republican Party lamented this consequence of the war. It stymied their goal of spreading American values throughout the world via military pressure and intervention, and it prevented them from reaffirming the American military in order to preserve the long-standing martial tradition that helped shore up the notion of American exceptionalism. Because of this frustration of their ideals, many conservatives worked during the 1980s to refashion the meaning of the conflict as a way of lessening this “syndrome,” as well as to restore the image of the military to reestablish American supremacy.¹¹

back into the fold, the lackluster presidency of Jimmy Carter combined with the memories of the turbulence of the 1960s and the corruption of the early 1970s sent many Democrats to the polls to vote for Ronald Reagan in the 1980 election. For a more detailed discussion of the “silent majority” see, Dan T. Carter, *The Politics of Rage*, 324-370. For a good discussion of the Nixon years and their effect on America (including the “silent majority”) see Bruce J. Schulman, *The Seventies: The Great Shift in American Culture, Society, and Politics* (Boston: Da Capo Press, 2002) 23-52. For a discussion on the Carter years and their effect on the populace see, Michael Schaller, *Right Turn: American Life in the Reagan-Bush Era, 1980-1992* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 27-48 and Schulman, *The Seventies*, 121-143.

¹⁰ Historian Bruce Schulman notes, “Many Americans sensed that the nation had entered a period of decline. No longer able to lead the world, the United States could no longer even find its own way home...Even those who could not point to specific political events like the war or the scandal felt that something had passed—the American Century, however abbreviated, had ended, *The Seventies*, 48-49.

¹¹ A strong discussion of the theory that the Reagan administration wanted to break down the “Vietnam Syndrome” occurs in political scientist William LeoGrande’s work *Our Own Backyard: The United States in Central America, 1977-1992*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), specifically see pages 3-9. Arnold R. Issacs goes into much greater depth on the “Syndrome” in *Vietnam Shadows* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 65-102.

The most studied aspect of this attempt is Ronald Reagan's efforts to re-establish the U.S. image at home and abroad via the expansion of American military might.¹² However, the Reagan story has many more layers than simply rebuilding a fabled nation; it ties into the larger campaign by the president and other conservative Republicans to reconfigure the martial tradition of the country and save the notion of exceptionalism, concepts on which U.S. military and international political prestige rested and from which American nationalism found much of its cement.¹³

The historical work closest to this dissertation's subject is Patrick Hagopian's *The Vietnam War in American Memory: Veterans, Memorials, and the Politics of Healing*, published in 2009.¹⁴ This work, however, only covers the role of the Reagan administration in this campaign. Hagopian concludes that Reagan discarded the noble

¹² Discussions of Reagan's desire to rebuild the American image are prominent in Michael Schaller *Reckoning with Reagan and Right Turn*; Gil Troy *Morning in America: How Ronald Reagan Invented the 1980s*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005); Martin Anderson *Revolution* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1988). An interesting, more abstract look at Reagan and his desire to renew American military might can be found in Susan Jeffords, *The Remasculinization of America: Gender and the Vietnam War* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1989).

¹³ Much of modern conservatism's adherence to the military tradition comes from its strong focus on national defense, the defense of freedom, and a respect for tradition. Good examinations of conservative tenets can be found in Charles W. Dunn and J. David Woodward, *The Conservative Tradition in America* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1996) and *Varieties of Conservatism in America*, ed. Peter Berkowitz, (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 2004). Also, for a strong overview of the American military tradition, see John M. Carroll and Colin F. Baxter, eds., *The American Military Tradition: From Colonial Times to Present*, second edition, (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2007).

¹⁴ In *The Pro-War Movement: Domestic Support for the Vietnam War and the Making of Modern American Conservatism* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2013), Sandra Scanlon touches on some of the subject matter contained in this dissertation as well. Scanlon argues that it wasn't until 1980 that a "strong consensus" had emerged among conservatives that "the alleged lessons of Vietnam related to how the war was fought, not to the principles on which U.S. intervention had been based," 2. It is this author's contention that this consensus was there from the start. Conservative tenets made the war important in relation to the principles on which the United States entered the conflict. The conservatives treated in both Scanlon's work and this dissertation never deviated in their understandings of the reasons for and the lessons of Vietnam. The only two influential figures Scanlon treats that do not fit this mold are Richard Nixon (often dismissed by staunch conservatives as one of their own) and Barry Goldwater (much less of a conservative icon than Scanlon portrays him).

cause idea early on because it “was politically problematic and divisive” and accepted that the message needed to be one of reconciliation.¹⁵ He also argues that, although Reagan played a role in rehabilitating the war, he mainly passed off the task to veterans’ groups and others who wanted to memorialize the war.¹⁶ When Reagan’s rhetoric did engage with the memory of the war, it was in “a less polemical way, by lauding those who fought in it.” As a result, Hagopian argues, Reagan played a minimal role in the revision of the Vietnam War’s consequences.¹⁷

This dissertation posits that the Reagan administration was an insignificant actor in the larger campaign to fight off the war’s efforts. Although healing was an element of Reagan’s plan, the administration did not fully discard the noble cause campaign when it moved to a focus on the men who served. It simply modified it to include the nobility of those who participated in the war. Both Reagan and other conservatives rhetorically seized these men and their service in order to reconfirm the martial nature of the United States and its male citizens in the hopes of perpetuating the myth of America’s special nature. In many ways, they strongly influenced Americans opinions of the aspects of the war and its participants.

The story told by this dissertation, set mainly in the 1970s and 1980s, highlights the efforts of a collection of conservatives who used their positions as prominent politicians, veterans, and intellectuals to recast the narrative of the Vietnam War and its meaning for American military tradition. A former general, a decorated Marine, a

¹⁵ Patrick Hagopian, *The Vietnam War in American Memory: Veterans, Memorials, and the Politics of Healing*, 12.

¹⁶ Ibid., 16.

¹⁷ Ibid., 16.

presidential administration, and the editors of the quintessential magazine for conservatives all fought their own battles to protect and redefine this martial tradition in order to save its corollary of perceived exceptionalism. At times their efforts intertwined, while at others their campaigns were distinctly their own. Woven together they highlight a concerted effort of adherents to the same political ideology that helped undo the damage of Vietnam. They promoted a revisionist narrative that explained the defeat and simultaneously resurrected the nobility of the military and its soldiers.¹⁸

In overlooking conservative Republicans' contributions to the much-altered understanding of the Vietnam War, historians have overlooked the significance of their influence in a multi-faceted story.¹⁹ Although much of the American public rejected efforts to redefine the war to garner support for military endeavors in the 1980s, the conservative rhetorical campaign helped reconfirm Americans' faith in the martial tradition. They successfully influenced the breakdown of long-held stigmas toward the

¹⁸ A good discussion of the tenets of modern conservatism can be found in Michael Schaller and George Rising, *The Republican Ascendancy: American Politics, 1968-2001*, part of The American History Series (Wheeling, Illinois: Harlan Davison, Inc., 2002), 1-26. The authors point out that by the 1950s and 1960s American conservatism became a "fused" and much more cohesive ideology that downplayed some of the tensions between "social conservative traditionalism and fiscally conservative libertarianism" via a focus on combating the communist threat. These tensions supposedly were eased by the efforts of *National Review* editor Frank Meyer, as well as further efforts by the periodical and its creator William F. Buckley. In this "new" conservatism, support of isolationism became a thing of the past.

¹⁹ Although Patrick Hagopian devotes his book *The Vietnam War in American Memory* to the contributions of the Reagan administration to the memory of the Vietnam War, most books regarding the re-fashioning of the war's narrative and the memory of it among the public do not lend these individuals much credence in shaping the American consciousness on the subject in the 1980s. These works include: Kristin Hass, *Carried to the Wall: American Memory and the Vietnam Veterans Memorial* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); Jerry Lembcke *The Spitting Image: Myth, Memory, and the Legacy of Vietnam* (New York: New York University Press, 1998); and Marita Sturken, *Tangled Memories: the Vietnam War, the AIDS Epidemic, and the Politics of Remembering* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997). Moreover, many of the works regarding how Americans views of veterans changed only focus on liberal and non-political veterans. These books include Myra MacPherson, *Long Time Passing: Vietnam and the Haunted Generation* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1984); Gerald Nicosia, *Home to War: A History of the Vietnam Veterans Movement* New York: Crown Publishers, 2001; and Fred Turner, *Echoes of Combat: Trauma, Memory, and the Vietnam War* (New York: Anchor Books, 1996).

war's participants that often stemmed from the controversial nature of the defeat. Conservatives contributed to shaping the new images of Vietnam veterans and the institution for which they served when they emphasized their martial nobility and duty to country, and they helped salvage the character of the military itself. This emphasis reaffirmed the martial tradition and shored up the myth that America's success as a nation was somehow a divinely inspired destiny that elevated it to a special status in the world.

This story begins with the first conservative to tackle the campaign to reverse the Vietnam War's effects, General William C. Westmoreland. In an attempt to save face for himself and the American military, he jump-started conservative efforts long before Reagan's insistence, during his 1980 presidential campaign, on the noble cause of Vietnam.²⁰ The general spent his time as Army Chief of Staff (1968-1972) attempting to rehabilitate the image of the Army and its members. He continued after his retirement to hawk his claims of the media's role in the loss of the war and the military's lack of battlefield defeats to anyone who would listen. Yet, throughout, his insistence on the valor of the men who fought in this unpopular and poorly executed war softened their

²⁰ Ronald Reagan typically holds credit for applying the term "noble cause" to the Vietnam War. Reagan used the term in his August 18, 1980 speech to the Veterans of Foreign Wars' national convention. However, as this dissertation argues, the spirit of this term turns up in numerous writings and speeches of other conservatives. Moreover, other historians claim that Reagan started using the term in 1980 and stopped using it by the next year, when it became clear Americans would not accept the war in that way (Patrick Hagopian argues this in *The Vietnam War in American Memory*). Although Reagan did not use this exact term he carried a 20 plus year legacy with him of talking about the war in similar, but not the same terms. Not only does this dissertation suggest Reagan never stopped pushing the idea of the "noble cause," but historian Toby Glen Bates documents Reagan's rhetoric on the war, not that the idea of nobility began floating around in Reagan's language in the early 1960s and remained with him after he left the presidency, *The Reagan Rhetoric: History and Memory in 1980s America* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2011), 44-63. The "noble cause" speech is called "Peace: Restoring the Margin of Safety," A Speech to the Veterans of Foreign Wars Convention, Chicago Illinois, August 18, 1980, *The Public Papers of President Ronald W. Reagan*, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/reference/8.18.80.html>.

image and made their entrance into the martial tradition more palatable by the mid-1980s, reconfiguring this major element of America's folklore of exceptionalism.

The story's next subject is former Marine and eventual Democratic senator James Webb who began his crusade to redeem the tarnished character of the Vietnam veteran during the 1970s. Sitting in a classroom at Georgetown University in 1974, frustrated by his invisibility to those for whom he fought, Webb decided to begin writing what would become a best-selling, hyper-masculine, and over-the-top novel, *Fields of Fire*; a tale that supposedly closely resembled his and others' time in Vietnam.²¹ He also worked to soften the blow of reintegration, in turn, attempting to moderate many Americans' harsh views of a group of men they believed were crazy, non-functional, and an embarrassment. His determination to place himself and his comrades into the tradition of martial masculinity opened up a dialogue about the nobility of the warrior (and veteran) who served, but lost the war. This modification of one of the most significant concepts of the martial tradition helped to repair it in the wake of the war and created the possibility of closing the wounds the loss in Vietnam caused to the notion of exceptionalism.

The most public figure of this tale of national reaffirmation and the renewal of conservative principles is President Ronald Reagan. During his eight years in the White House, he and his advisors made a concerted effort to wipe away the stigma placed on the war and its participants by insisting that both symbolized the United States' highest ideals: commitment to freedom, honor, and duty. Reagan shamelessly focused on the pomp and circumstance and the symbolism of medals and memorials as a way to reveal the most positive aspects of the war and elevate the controversial defeat into the

²¹ Robert Timberg, *The Nightingale's Song* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995) 222-223.

American military tradition. That unabashed tribute to militarism created a path for Americans to accept the Vietnam veteran as a valiant member of the U.S. military and glorified the institution as one of the most important actors in the history of the nation and its perceived exceptional nature.

In contrast, the members of the last vein of this story, the editors of conservative periodical *National Review* and its creator/editor William F. Buckley, spent little time trying to situate the war or the men who fought it within the martial tradition because they deemed it unnecessary.²² Their campaign focused on the creation of a savior of the American military establishment and of American exceptionalism, rather than working to justify the already valiant efforts of the men who fought in Vietnam. They began this effort, reluctantly, with Richard Nixon who quickly disappointed them. After the election of Ronald Reagan, they renewed their attempts to redeem the country and its values, but they ultimately deemed Reagan's attempts at a strong and redemptive foreign policy in Central America a failure. It was not until the Gulf War that the magazine's editors found its true knight in shining armor; a new, improved, and technologically savvy American military that could reestablish perceptions of America's special nature.

Tied together these stories illustrate the determination of conservatives to keep the stigma of Vietnam from destroying American military tradition and the notion of American exceptionalism, a campaign that went well beyond trying to restore public support for interventionist foreign policy endeavors. The individuals involved wanted to

²² William Buckley and the other editors of *National Review* refused to place the blame for the war's loss on those who served in it. This dissertation treats this issue in the chapter "Saving the 'City on a Hill.'"

preserve the tradition of militarism that undergirded the country's role in world affairs, while saving its fabled image as a beacon of hope and strength across the globe.

The possible destruction of the concept of America's special nature moved these conservatives to refashion the war and perhaps alter its far-reaching impact on their goals for the country. Although the participants in this campaign did not destroy the Vietnam Syndrome and usher in an era of major public support for military interventionism, they stopped the bleeding of the martial tradition and its corollaries in the wake of the Vietnam War. American notions of martial masculinity and militarism during this period of revisionism changed radically, sustaining their importance and preserving their influence on the country's mythology.

CHAPTER 2

AN EXCEPTION TO THE WORLD: THE CREATION OF AMERICAN EXCEPTIONALISM

In late spring of 1945, just weeks after the death of Adolf Hitler and Germany's unconditional surrender to the Allied forces, President Harry S. Truman addressed the American people regarding the Allies' ability to win the war in the Pacific. Of course, the atomic bomb determined the outcome of the Second World War, but before that fateful decision came to fruition, the country's citizens needed reassurance that a defeat of the Empire of Japan in a larger ground war existed.

Japan, Truman told the American public "should realize that this Nation, now at the peak of its military strength, will not relax, will not weaken in its purpose" as it moved from a dual front war to one solely focused on the Asian empire. With a freshly produced and massive arsenal of weaponry, as well as a significant amount of well-trained manpower, he argued, the country no doubt has "the men, the material, the skill, the leadership, the fortitude to achieve total victory."¹

In fact, Truman declared, the melding of American war production with the heart and soul of its warriors allowed the United States to reach this martial pinnacle. Akin to the men of the Revolution, "the American soldier of this war is as brave and as magnificent as the American soldier has always been. He has the initiative and ingenuity he has always had." But matching that soul with the United States' relatively newfound manufacturing abilities, according to the president, was the recipe for triumphant success

¹ Harry S. Truman, "Special Message to the Congress on Winning the War with Japan," June 1, 1945, *The Public Papers of the Presidents, Harry S. Truman 1945-1953*, The Harry S. Truman Library and Museum, <http://www.trumanlibrary.org/publicpapers/index.php?pid=52&st=soldiers&st1>.

that made him “a better soldier and a more successful soldier than he has ever been before.”²

In assuring the American people that the nation’s martial strength would defeat the Japanese forces, Truman presented a rhetorical message that helped define how the United States and much of the world viewed America’s military, its soldiers, and its international power after World War II. These words and the eventual outcome of the war shaped the pathway for the solidification of its veterans’ place within the hallowed myths of America’s martial tradition and its corollary of martial masculinity. Moreover, they promoted the myth of American exceptionalism to unprecedented heights.

Many believed the post-World War II clout of the United States rested on the special nature or divinely-inspired destiny of the country, a concept helped along by the U.S. military’s numerous and often surprising successes dating back to the Revolution. When the nation’s power reached its pinnacle in World War II and the early Cold War era, this myth, along with martial tradition and the concept of martial masculinity, strengthened and solidified. Yet, just over twenty years after the end of the Second World War, America’s inadequate performance in Southeast Asia threatened these major elements of the country’s image of itself and of its place in the world.

The Origins of the Exceptionalism Notion

The first time a discussion of the special nature of the United States arose was as the Puritans crossed the Atlantic Ocean under the guidance of John Winthrop. He told the colonists to start a new life free of religious persecution that “we must consider that

² Ibid.

we shall be as a city upon a hill. The eyes of all people are upon us.”³ Winthrop’s words admonished his fellow travelers that the world would scrutinize their actions, and therefore, their failures. This initiated among this set of new colonists a sense of exceptionalism when their colony succeeded; something other, non-Puritan colonists also conformed to over time.⁴

As the colonies expanded in number, many more settlers adopted this understanding of their ability to survive and eventually thrive in their often harsh, new physical environment.⁵ Historian Reginald Horsman suggests, “in less favorable circumstances the Americans could have become one of those many groups of people who have believed themselves favored by Providence, but who eventually have been chastened by disappointment.” But their experience differed, and “what was unique in the American experience was overwhelming success on the bountiful North American

³ John Winthrop, “A Model of Christian Charity, 1630,” Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, 1838, Third Series, 7:31-48, *Hanover Historical Texts Project*, <http://history.hanover.edu/texts/winthmod.html>. Conservative Americans often cite Puritan John Winthrop’s thesis “A Model of Christian Charity,” written on the *Arabella* as it sailed for the Massachusetts Bay Colony, as the first instance of this value of exceptionalism among “Americans.” These words also reflected the biblical passage Matthew 5: 14 (King James Version), “Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid.”

⁴ Strong discussions of Winthrop and the Puritans experiences in North America, as well as their role in the development of New England culture and the notion of exceptionalism can be found in Edmund S Morgan, *The Puritan Dilemma: The Story of John Winthrop*, Part of the Library of American Biography Series, Third Edition, (New York: Pearson, Inc., 2006) and Michael Parker, *John Winthrop: Funding the City Upon a Hill*, Part of the Routledge Historical Americans Series, (New York: Routledge, 2014).

⁵ William Cronon discusses the “dynamic and changing relationship between environment and culture,” 13, in *Changes in the Land: Indians Colonists and the Ecology of New England* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1983). He also suggests that Europeans viewed the new landscape in which they now lived in terms of their own European culture and perspective, deeming it harsh and inhospitable and working to tame it, 22. , He also outlines their attempts to survive on European terms from 34-53. In *American Exceptionalism* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1998), Deborah L Madsen discusses in significant depth the cultural creation of exceptionalism among those who survived the harshness of the Eastern seaboard, 16-40.

continent and the remarkable events that dominated its history from the seventeenth to the mid-nineteenth century.”⁶

Moreover, their attitudes toward Native Americans and their aggressive interactions with them augmented among the colonists a mentality that they were special, as many settlers brought with them racial ideologies of the “Old World” that deemed the Anglo-Saxon race superior to the “savages” they encountered in the “New World.”⁷

The first elements of an American military tradition arose in the era as well. The colonies created local militias to protect the colonists, an act that took on new urgency as they moved further inland and precipitated more conflict with Native Americans. Initially, male colonists saw participation in a colony’s militia as a significant burden, as the protection of their family and property held greater importance than the security of their colony. Historian Harold Peckham argued decades ago in his seminal work *The Colonial Wars* that, although colonists and the future Americans loved the heroism of the citizen soldier, “indifference” marred commitment to the militias and the early American military.⁸

This understanding played a role in morale during wars with Native Americans and the Wars for Empire that reached all the way to North America. However, that mindset changed during the American Revolution, augmenting, but not solidifying, men’s comfort with the realities of the citizen soldier. George Washington’s leadership of

⁶ Reginald Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny: The Origins of American Racial Anglo-Saxonism*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), 83.

⁷Horsman discusses this understanding of Anglo-Saxons in *Race and Manifest Destiny*, 9-24.

⁸ Howard H. Peckham, *The Colonial Wars, 1689-1762*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965), 1-4.

the Continental Army, according to noted military historian Don Higginbotham, had much to do with this change as he “had to create a new army without shared traditions . . . composed of men almost exclusively from civilian backgrounds from all over America.”⁹ Washington, albeit ignoring the dissension and lack of strong cohesion among many of these men, highlighted this diversity in his “Farewell Orders to the Armies of the United States,” noting his surprise “that Men who came from different parts of the Continent . . . would instantly become one patriotic band of brothers.”¹⁰

Washington and the soldiers of the Revolution clearly reflected a new variety of masculinity forming in American society.¹¹ Previously, cultural and social norms in the colonies made submission to the crown a significant part of the definition of masculinity because that characteristic ensured stability.¹² Now, this newly popular definition of manhood accepted mental and physical aggression and frowned on male submission to a higher institutional authority, at least in the material world. This type of masculinity also included characteristics like “ambition, assertiveness, and a lust for power and fame.”¹³

⁹ Don Higginbotham, *George Washington and the American Military Tradition*, (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1985), 72-73

¹⁰ George Washington’s “Farewell Orders to the Armies of the United States,” November 2, 1783, *Writings of Washington*, 27:224 as quoted in Higginbotham, *George Washington and the American Military Tradition*, 73. Credit also goes to Higginbotham for the paraphrased wording regarding Washington ignoring the problems he had in making his men a highly cohesive unit, 73.

¹¹ Good biographies and works on George Washington include Ron Chernow, *Washington: A Life*, (New York: Penguin Press, 2010) and Joseph J. Ellis, *His Excellency: George Washington*, (New York: Vintage, Random House, 2004).

¹² E. Anthony Rotundo, *American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1993), 17-19. It is important to note that this more aggressive style of mainstream masculinity was only one of many types of mainstream masculinities adhered to by American men.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 11.

The pinnacle of manhood was one successful in being “independent, virtuous, honest, stalwart, [and] loyal to male comrades.”¹⁴

Moreover, supplanting the colonial desire to protect family and property, rather than giving one’s all to the militia, was the idea of responsibility to the new nation. Duty became “a crucial word for manhood” after the Revolution, according to E. Anthony Rotundo, a concept that stemmed from New Englanders’ devotion to community and developed from their Puritan background and the religion’s influence on the region’s society.¹⁵ By the late 1700s, Americans had laid much of the groundwork for its national traditions and concepts.

The Establishment of a Strong Martial Tradition

Detachment from the motherland gave the Americans the opportunity, as Thomas Paine concluded, to “begin the world over again,” and the successful challenge to England’s power augmented the notion of American exceptionalism, which amplified the military’s role in helping America fulfill its destiny and created along the way what would become a concept of persisting importance: martial masculinity.¹⁶

¹⁴ Kimmel calls this type of man the “Heroic Artisan.” Kimmel also identifies two other types of masculinity in the late 18th and early 19th century. The “Genteel Patriarch” “refined and aristocratic” and the “Self-Made Man” whose characteristics would become more accepted in by mid-century after the market revolution occurred. His characteristics connected more to finances, particularly his ability to be upwardly mobile. *Manhood in America: A Cultural History* (New York: Free Press, 1996), 16-17.

¹⁵ Rotundo, 11-13.

¹⁶ Thomas Paine, *Common Sense*, 1792. This quote is found in the “Appendix to the Third Edition” of *Common Sense*, which is presented in its entirety on the website www.ushistory.org. The index of the pamphlet is found at <http://www.ushistory.org/paine/commonsense/index.htm>, while the appendix is found at <http://www.ushistory.org/paine/commonsense/sense6.htm>.

The early 1800s saw a continued evolution of all of these concepts and traditions; the U.S. military's role in the supposedly exceptional nature of America and the events of these years had a significant impact on the concept of the martial man. Further territorial expansion created by the Louisiana Purchase in 1803 created a need for exploration of the West, starting with the Lewis and Clark Expedition of 1804. This voyage and others that followed included many army volunteers due to their experience in wilderness survival while protecting the country's frontier.¹⁷

The efforts of the military in this and future expeditions both on the land and at sea served to professionalize the military and garnered the fledgling institution and its soldiers' significant respect among the American people. Their examination and documentation of the wilderness and the land itself created a sense of career professionalization for the military among the populace as soldiers and officers' knowledge expanded scientific understandings of the world.

Moreover, their experiences in the "wild" made them heroes willing to sacrifice their comfort and maybe even their lives for the development of the nation. Filibuster William Walker personified this perceived selflessness to many in the mid-nineteenth century, Amy S. Greenberg contends, because he, like others before him, "proved his

¹⁷A good condensed version of Lewis and Clark's personal journals of their expedition is found in Landon Y. Jones, *The Essential Lewis and Clark*, (New York: HarperCollins, 2000). Stephen E. Ambrose's *Undaunted Courage: Meriwether Lewis, Thomas Jefferson, and the Opening of the American West* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996) despite Ambrose's professional transgressions, continued to be a good reference for the expedition. Moreover, there are multiple editions of Lewis' journals both abridged and unabridged in existence.

masculinity through heroic courage, aggressivity, and rejection of both physical and financial comfort.”¹⁸

As for professionalization of military affairs, the first step in that direction occurred the year before the Louisiana Purchase with the formal authorization of the first U.S. military academy at West Point, NY.¹⁹ Although helpful in preparing a small number of cadets for military service in its first decades, it initially focused on expanding American knowledge of engineering, math, and science.²⁰

It was not until the Mexican-American War that a significant number of West Point-trained men proved their mettle on the battlefield, part of an era that Stephen E. Ambrose called its “The Golden Age.”²¹ Their successes institutionalized the importance of professional training of the country’s military leaders and formalized the issue of martial masculinity.

However, the War of 1812 played its own part in solidifying the American martial tradition and notions of exceptionalism.²² British threats and disrespect of the United States on the high seas led to domestic concerns about the country’s place in an

¹⁸ Amy S. Greenberg, *Manifest Manhood and the Antebellum American Empire*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 158.

¹⁹ The edited work, Robert M.S. McDonald, ed., *Thomas Jefferson’s Military Academy: Founding West Point* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2004) gives a strong account of the origins of the academy. For a full overview of its history see, Theodore Crackel, *West Point: A Bicentennial History*, (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2002).

²⁰ Matthew S. Muehlbauer and David J. Ulbrich, *Ways of War, American Military History from the Colonia Era to the Twenty-First Century*, (New York: Routledge, 2013), 145

²¹ In *Duty, Honor, Country: A History of West Point*, Paperback Edition, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1999), Ambrose suggest these golden years are 1840-1860. He devotes a chapter to this culminating era in the book, 125-147. Theodore Crackel discusses this period in *West Point: A Bicentennial History*, 107-136.

²² A good overview of the war is Donald R. Hickey, *The War of 1812: A Forgotten Conflict*, Bicentennial Edition, (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2012).

international system that was becoming increasingly important to the United States, especially in relation to economics. The country took a risk to defend its honor on the high seas as well as to defeat Native Americans within the United States that aligned with Great Britain in what many called the “Second War of Independence.” Historian Donald S. Hickey suggests this was an exaggeration, as the threat “was more imagined than real” because Britain’s real objective simply was to win the Napoleonic Wars at any cost.²³

Yet, the ability to survive the war, which turned out to be a diplomatic draw despite the weakness of a small American military in the face of a mighty superpower (albeit one preoccupied with the events on its own continent), served to augment the country’s belief in its exceptionalism. Moreover, it led to the election of another popular military veteran to the presidency in 1828, Andrew Jackson, the hero of the Battle of New Orleans.²⁴

This continued a rather steady tradition of the election of veterans to the presidency rarely broken for any real length of time until the period between 1912 and 1945 and again in 1992 with the election of Bill Clinton. Diplomatic historian Alexander DeConde noted in his study of masculinity and the presidency, *Presidential Machismo*, that “in times of real or imagined international crises” historically the American populace always tended to support their presidents “as though they were father figures.”²⁵ As a

²³ Ibid., 303.

²⁴ Excellent biographies of Jackson include: H.W. Brands, *Andrew Jackson: His Life and Times*, (New York: Doubleday, 2005), Jon Meacham, *American Lion: Andrew Jackson in the White House*, (New York: Random House, 2008), and Sean Wilentz, *Andrew Jackson*, Part of The American Presidents Series, (New York: Times Books, 2005).

²⁵ Alexander DeConde, *Presidential Machismo: Executive Authority, Military Intervention, and Foreign Relations* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2000), 292-293.

result, it made sense that American voters often turned to a presumably strong and valorous military veteran for leadership.

President James K. Polk's chance to become a martial father figure arrived in 1848, as aggressive thirst for territorial growth forced a war with Mexico so the United States could claim California, allow the country to traverse the continent, and gain new ports to the Pacific.²⁶ The military's role in this expansion of the country's territory and its international power solidified during the Mexican-American War, enhancing its prestige. A victory that relied on officers and soldiers from the military and citizen volunteers, it created a new sense that the United States military and its martial men were a powerful force with which to be reckoned and it further professionalized the institution's ranks.

John S.D. Eisenhower argued "the success of American arms represented a remarkable feat," even though many are "tempted . . . to regard the unbroken string of American victories as easy."²⁷ Yet, it was quite easy for Americans of the time to see the hyper-successful outcome of the conflict as reinforcing the idea of a powerful, unstoppable America fulfilling its *manifest destiny*.²⁸

²⁶ Good modern discussions of the War with Mexico include John S.D. Eisenhower, *So Far from God: The U.S. War with Mexico, 1846-1848* (New York: Random House, 1989), Amy S. Greenberg, *A Wicked War: Polk, Clay, Lincoln, and the 1846 U.S. Invasion of Mexico* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2012), Timothy J. Henderson, *A Glorious Defeat: Mexico and its War with the United States* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2007), and Richard Bruce Winders, *Mr. Polk's Army: The American Experience in the Mexican War* (College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 2001).

²⁷ John S.D. Eisenhower, *So Far from God*, xxi.

²⁸ *Manifest Destiny* is the belief that the United States and its citizens were destined to traverse the North American continent. One of the first instances of a discussion of this concept is in John L. O'Sullivan's essay "The Great Nation of Futurity," *The United States Democratic Review* 0006, No. 23, November 1839, : 426-430. This source is available from Cornell University Library's *Making of America* journal archive: <http://digital.library.cornell.edu/cgi/t/text/text-idx?c=usde;idno=usde0006-4>. Frederick Merk discussed this concept at length in *Manifest Destiny and Mission in American History: A*

The acquisition of new territories of the United States, the Mexican-American War, and military filibustering turned into proving grounds for American masculinity.²⁹ Greenberg argues, “New American territories were embraced by some American men because they offered opportunities for individual heroic initiative and for success in love and war.”³⁰ Other forms of accepted masculinity existed, such as restrained manhood in which men used “their religious faith, their domestic virtue and treatment of family members, their ability to abstain from drinking . . . and their success as breadwinner” to highlight their virility.³¹ However, many men now based mainstream masculinity on the characteristic of great physical strength and the ability to dominate others with “aggression and violence.”³²

By the 1860s, men throughout the United States and the Confederate States of America had the chance to prove they possessed these characteristics on the battlefields of the Civil War. Participation in the War Between the States often hinged on a main ideal of martial masculinity, duty to nation and its ideals; however, it also allowed for the

Reinterpretation (New York: Knopf, 1963). He suggests Americans believed they had found “a new earth for building a new heaven,” 3. However, he believed the concept had little support among the populace and was merely used as a rhetorical tool, 245.

²⁹ Good examinations of the filibusters include Charles H. Brown, *Agents of Manifest Destiny: The Lives and Times of the Filibusters* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980), Amy S. Greenberg, *Manifest Manhood and the Antebellum American Empire*, and Robert E. May, *Manifest Destiny's Underworld: Filibustering in Antebellum America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002) and *The Southern Dream of a Caribbean Empire, 1854-1861* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1973).

³⁰ Greenberg, 3.

³¹ Greenberg, 140.

³² Greenberg 12. Greenberg also identifies refined masculinity as another predominant type of masculinity during this period. This concept's characteristics were more in line with business and political ideals. Moreover, she and others discuss the idea of the closely related primitive masculinity that had similar physical and aggressive criteria, but was outside the realm of martial endeavors, Greenberg, 9.

evolution of one of its key components: martial brotherhood, which often maintained combat motivation.³³ The band of brothers George Washington spoke of regarding the Continental Army became of the utmost importance in the Civil War. Historian of the era James M. McPherson, suggests that this “experience of combat did more than strengthen existing bonds; it also dissolved the petty rivalries and factions that existed in some regiments and forged new bonds among men who saw the elephant together.”³⁴

In the years after the Civil War, as a new generation of men came to the forefront of society, men who had not had the chance to participate in war, the definition of manhood seemed to go into crisis. The significant technological and industrial changes of the latter half of the 19th century altered everyday life.³⁵ These changes damaged male understandings of their place in society. Although some like sociologist Michael Kimmel suggested this occurred because “the courage and self-sacrifice demanded by that great struggle [the Civil War] contrasted sharply with the soft, pampered life of the business and professional classes after the war,” it was much more complex.³⁶

³³ James M. McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades: Why Men Fought in the Civil War*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 3.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 85.

³⁵ A good overview of these changes and the responses to them in the urban environment is Raymond A. Mohl, *The New City: Urban America in the Industrial Age, 1860-1920* (Wheeling, IL: Harlan Davison, 1985). An excellent examination of these changes and the responses to them in rural, northern America is Hal S. Barron, *Mixed Harvest: The Second Great Transformation of in the Rural North, 1870-193*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997).

³⁶ Michael Kimmel, *Manhood in America*, 223. Much has been written about this period of tumult in both urban and rural areas. For the purposes of this dissertation, this chapter’s focus will remain more on urban, rather than rural men. In *The Paranoid Style in American Politics and Other Essays* (New York: Knopf, 1965) historian Richard Hofstadter suggests this period constituted a psychic crisis that many Americans of mainstream political persuasions wanted quelled because its continuance might serve to promote social and political radicalism, creating fringe political groups and altering the course of American politics in a supposedly negative way. Kristin Hoganson argues in *Fighting for American Manhood: How Gender Politics Provoked the Spanish-American and Philippine-American Wars* (New Haven: Yale

The massive influx of immigrants in the mid and late nineteenth century from Germany, China, and multiple areas in Southern Europe, purportedly threatened the livelihood of the common man due to a loss of jobs, while the women's suffrage movement that began in 1848 endangered men's traditional roles in society.³⁷ The closing of the frontier also threatened their virility because as Frederick Jackson Turner believed the rugged individualism developed by forging a life and new communities in the wilderness would die out and endanger the advancement of America's exceptionalism.³⁸ Then, in the early 1890s, a severe economic downturn hit the country that would last until 1898, further preventing men from fulfilling the simple task of providing for their families.³⁹ Fear of not meeting the requirements of American masculinity, including the lack of war to serve as a proving ground for it, led many men to question their ability to achieve manhood.⁴⁰

University Press, 1998), 13-14 that this psychic crisis, as well as elites' remedies for it had significant gender causations and implications.

³⁷ An excellent overview of U.S. immigration is Roger Daniels, *Coming to America: A History of Immigration and Ethnicity in American Life*, Second Edition, (New York: HarperPerennial, 2002). For an in-depth look at immigration from Southern Europe, see Mark Wyman, *Round-Trip to America: The Immigrants Return to Europe, 1880-1930* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996). A good narrative-based discussion of Chinese immigration is found in Iris Chang, *The Chinese in America: A Narrative History* (New York: Viking, 2003). Excellent works regarding the women's suffrage movement and the women's movement as a whole include Eleanor Flexner, *Century of Struggle: The Women's Rights Movement in the United States* (New York: Atheneum, 1972), Sally McMillen, *Seneca Falls and the Origins of the Women's Rights Movement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008) and Ruth Rosen, *The World Split Open: How the Modern Women's Movement Changed America*, Revised Edition, (New York: Penguin Press, 2001).

³⁸ The Frontier Thesis became a significant part of historical studies from its inception in 1893 in Turner's academic essay "The Significance of the Frontier," given to the American Historical Association at the Chicago World's Fair.

³⁹ Timothy Knight discusses the Panic of 1893 in *Panic, Prosperity, and Progress: Five Centuries of History and the Markets* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley and Sons, 2014), 97-112.

⁴⁰ Kristin Hoganson discusses this issue in significant depth in the chapter "The Manly Ideal of Politics and the Jingoist Desire for War" in *Fighting for American Manhood*, 15-42

In the meantime, the country itself seemed on the verge of failing in its role as an exceptional nation. Concerns arose among some in the government and the military over whether or not men emasculated by domestic problems would make good soldiers, especially since the country needed them for the next stage of American expansion after the close of the American domestic frontier: international territorial acquisition. Moreover, many men began to wonder if they would ever get the chance to prove their martial manhood like their fathers and others in the Civil War. The battlefield, in the eyes of many, both the elite and the common man, taught “courage, strength, endurance, duty, principled sacrifice,” the exact elements of what it meant to be “real” man.⁴¹

Many young American men of the late 19th century got the chance to test their manhood in the Spanish-American War, an event for which pro-imperialist politicians, businessmen, yellow journalists, and jingoists clamored.⁴² Even members of the upper echelon of the military seemed to point toward the United States’ aggressive entrance into international affairs, with naval theorist Alfred Thayer Mahan suggesting it would prove the nation’s masculinity and point it toward its intended greatness.⁴³ The war ended with the United States taking on the role of an imperialist international power in both Cuba and the Philippines, while its quick and successful outcome in Cuba again

⁴¹ Kimmel, 234.

⁴² Good discussions of the Spanish-American War include Philip S. Foner, *The Spanish-Cuban-American War and the Birth of American Imperialism, 1895-1902* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972), Louis L. Gould, *The Spanish-American War and President McKinley* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1982), and Louis A. Pérez, *The War of 1898: The United States and Cuba in History and Historiography* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1998).

⁴³ Hoganson, 10.

amplified the strength of the American military and reiterated the importance of martial service for achieving manhood.⁴⁴

After the war, martial masculinity remained for many the pinnacle of manhood, and it became important for men who were not actively engaged in the military to maintain the aggressive characteristics of the concept. Eventually, competitive sports and an element of competition in all areas of life arose as a means to maintain the aggressive strains of one's manhood.⁴⁵ This preservation, or for younger generation of males, creation, of the bellicosity of maleness outside of war meant that the martial man was always waiting in the wings to perform the psychological and physical duties necessary to engage in warfare.

Vocal American imperialist Theodore Roosevelt campaigned for the maintenance of the virtuous characteristics present in this aggressive style of manhood.⁴⁶ He told the American public in 1899, "I wish to preach, not the doctrine of ignoble ease, but the doctrine of the strenuous life, the life of toil and effort, of labor and strife." He wanted "to preach that highest form of success which comes, not to the man who desires mere

⁴⁴ The Spanish-American War lasted just over three months in the spring/summer of 1898. However, from 1899 to 1902 the United States fought the Philippine-American war against Filipino nationalists led by Emilio Aguinaldo. Both wars fulfilled America's imperialist desires. The United States occupied Cuba from 1898 to 1902 and maintained it as a protectorate via the Platt Amendment until 1934. In the Philippines, it was not until 1946 that Filipinos gained full independence from the United States.

⁴⁵ Rotundo, 222-223. .

⁴⁶ Gail Bederman presents an in-depth discussion of Theodore Roosevelt's understanding of manhood and his ideology of the strenuous life in *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 170-215.

easy peace, but to the man who does not shrink from danger, from hardship, or from bitter toil, and who out of these wins the splendid ultimate triumph.”⁴⁷

Roosevelt, soon to be president in 1901 after the assassination of William McKinley, also wanted this form of manhood to survive because it assisted in keeping the idea of American exceptionalism alive among the populace. Moreover, it would bolster the new empire and reinforce the martial strength of the country. He implored his fellow citizens to “shrink from no strife, moral or physical, within or without the nation . . . for it is only through strife, through hard and dangerous endeavor, that we shall ultimately win the goal of true national greatness.”⁴⁸

The Solidification of the Exceptionalism Myth

This notion of exceptionalism and the strength of the U.S. military found another test in the ethnic tensions and system of alliances in Europe in the 1910s. The desire to seek economic advantage in the situation in Europe, and the isolationist tendencies of the populace regarding warfare, initially kept Woodrow Wilson from entering World War I and forced his administration, according to David M. Kennedy, “to cultivate—even manufacture—public opinion favorable to the war.”⁴⁹

When the Americans finally entered into battle in 1919, victory occurred rather swiftly. European soldiers on both sides of the conflict were war weary, and the infusion

⁴⁷ Theodore Roosevelt, “The Strenuous Life” <http://voicesofdemocracy.umd.edu/roosevelt-strenuous-life-1899-speech-text/>

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ David M. Kennedy, *Over Here: The First World War and American Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 46.

of American blood psychologically benefitted the Allies, while it psychically defeated the Germans.⁵⁰ As Robert H. Zieger argues, “one clear result of direct U.S. participation in the Great War was that the fighting ended in western Europe at least a year earlier than would have been the case without American belligerency.”⁵¹ The Americans left the war with even greater international political capital, particularly in relation to Europe, and Ziegler claims this “drove home the fact that America was Europe’s offspring and successor.”⁵²

As for the war’s veterans, many did not fare well under the stresses of the war, overwhelmed by the sights and sounds of bomber planes and their ammunition, gassings, machine gunfire, and the horrific nature of trench warfare.⁵³ However, it is important to note that Europeans endured more, and for a much longer period, than the Americans did. David M. Kennedy notes that “most of the young men in the AEF (American Expeditionary Force) had arrived too late and moved too swiftly to be deeply disabused of their adventurous expectations” of warfare.⁵⁴ Indeed, they experienced shell shock too

⁵⁰ Strong examinations of the U.S. experience in World War I include: Justus D. Doenecke, *Nothing Less Than War: A New History of America’s Entry into World War I* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2011) and John S.D. Eisenhower, *Yanks: The Epic Story of the American Army in World War I* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2001). For a good overview of the battles and strategies of the war see, Peter Hart, *The Great War: A Combat History of the First World War* (London: Oxford University Press, 2014).

⁵¹ Robert H. Zieger, *America’s Great War: World War I and the American Experience* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2000), 2.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 2.

⁵³ Denis Winter, *Death’s Men: Soldiers of the Great War* (London: Penguin Books, 1979) presents the story of those who fought in the war. For good examinations of how technology and warfare affected the British men who fought in World War II see Peter Leese, *Shell Shock: Traumatic Neurosis and the British Soldiers of the First World War* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002) and Fiona Reid, *Broken Men: Shell Shock, Treatment, and Recovery in Britain, 1914-1930* (London: Continuum International Publishing, 2010).

⁵⁴ David M. Kennedy, *Over Here*, 229-230.

and came to the “realization that modern military combat was something quite different from what they as eager troops had been led to expect.” Yet, many used the “outrage” they felt at the impersonal nature of new warfare to psych themselves up and mete out retribution. As Kennedy suggests in his study of these American participants, “what strikes the reader of these personal war records is their unflaggingly positive, even enthusiastic note.”⁵⁵

Many believed that the best and the brightest died on the battlefields in World War I, and the war, with its death and destruction, led to a disillusionment and despair among the world’s “Lost Generation” that matured during the war. However, that notion held stronger ties in Europe and among a community of intellectuals and literary writers.⁵⁶ American understandings of the martial nature of masculinity and the power and strength of their nation stayed well engrained in mainstream culture and the government during this period. Although Kennedy argues, “despite the dreams of some men at the time . . . the United States was not in 1919 . . . yet heir to the mantle of ‘empire’ . . . still a pretender to the title,” the nation certainly did not perceive it that way.⁵⁷ The United States, now a major player in the international system, prepared for what many saw as inevitable future conflict, mobilizing its industry and readying its military during the interwar period.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Ibid. 211-212.

⁵⁶ Noel Riley Fitch, *Sylvia Beach and the Lost Generation: A History of Literary Paris in the Twenties and Thirties* (New York: Norton, 1983).

⁵⁷ Kennedy, 347.

⁵⁸ The following books highlight the major strategic and production planning that occurred during the Interwar period. Michael G. Carew, *Becoming the Arsenal: The American Industrial Mobilization for*

The Empire of Japan's decision to bomb Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941 set the fruits of this planning into motion. In the Pacific Theater of World War II, the strategically prepared United States with a strong naval machine behind it, fought with Australia and New Zealand against a determined, but militarily weaker Japan.⁵⁹ The United States and its allies in the European Theater, despite the tactics of the maniacal Adolf Hitler, successfully pushed back the Germans, liberating the countries taken by Hitler, and occupying Germany.⁶⁰ When the final phase of the war ended with the Japanese surrender on September 2, 1945 just weeks after the United States dropped atomic bombs on both Hiroshima and Nagasaki, it was clear that American technological, industrial, and economic might gathered prior and during the war proved more than effective.

At the end of the war, the martial masculinity of the United States busted at the seams. The images of the major heroes of the Second World War demonstrated the strength, power, and manhood of the United States, no nonsense men such as Generals

World War II, 1938-1942 (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2010), Mark Clodfelter, *Beneficial Bombing: The Progressive Foundations of American Air Power, 1917-1945* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2010), Henry G. Cole, *The Road to Rainbow: Army Planning for Global War, 1934-1940* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2002) and David Ulbrich, *Preparing for Victory: Thomas Holcomb and the Making of the Modern Marine Corps, 1936-1943* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2013).

⁵⁹Excellent examinations of the entirety of World War II are Martin Gilbert, *The Second World War: A Complete History* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1989), Max Hastings, *Inferno: The World at War, 1939-1945* (New York: Knopf, 2011), and Williamson Murray and Allan R. Millett, *A War to be Won: Fighting the Second World War* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2000). Good overviews of the war with Japan include John W. Dower, *War without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War* (New York: Random House, 1986), Ronald H. Spector, *Eagle Against the Sun: The American War with Japan* (New York: Free Press, 1985), Jonathan G. Utley, *Going to War with Japan, 1937-1941* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1985).

⁶⁰For specific discussions of some of the major points in the European Theater see, Antony Beevor, *Stalingrad: The Fateful Siege* (New York: Penguin Books, 1999), John S.D. Eisenhower, *The Bitter Woods: The Battle of the Bulge* (New York: Putnam, 1969), Max Hastings, *Armageddon: The Battle for Germany, 1944-1945* (New York: Vintage Books, 2005), and John C. McManus, *Those Dead and Those About to Die: D-Day, The Big Red One at Omaha Beach* (New York: Penguin Books, 2014).

Douglas MacArthur, George Patton, and Dwight Eisenhower. Yet, the average soldier of the war proved the mettle of the country even more, and he exemplified what it meant to be a martial man.

John C. McManus, in his attempt to understand how they fought in the war so “effectively and cohesively” using “reserves of courage that they probably thought they did not possess,” pinpoints martial brotherhood as the answer.⁶¹ Many volunteered while others waited for the draft, but almost all adhered to an intense camaraderie that became their “single most important sustaining and motivating force,” an understanding that “was pervasive among the troops who fought the war.”⁶² At its end, the war established the pinnacle of George Washington’s belief in the band of brothers, and was a culmination of well over 100 years of American efforts to prove the notion of exceptionalism, develop the martial tradition, and cultivate martial men.⁶³

The Second World War led the United States to new economic, political, and cultural heights due to its own performance, the use of the atomic bomb, and the significant damage done to Western Europe’s cities, populations, and economies. The men who served, now known popularly as the “Greatest Generation,” returned home to ticker-tape parades, received the G.I. Bill, and went on to augment and utilize the new

⁶¹ John C. McManus, *The Deadly Brotherhood: The American Combat Soldier in World War II* (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1998), Kindle Edition: Loc 62.

⁶² *Ibid.*, Kindle Edition, Loc 69.

⁶³ It should be noted that Stephen E. Ambrose used this term for World War II soldiers in *Band of Brothers: E Company, 506th Regiment, 101st Airborne from Normandy to Hitler’s Eagle’s Nest* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2001) and popularized in the modern lexicon. However, it is important to note that this term is a part of the language of the martial tradition, and it is the invention of George Washington in relation to the American myth, rather than a more modern understanding that it Ambrose coined it.

American economy.⁶⁴ Michael D. Gambone argues, they “deserve equal credit for establishing the footing of a stable and prosperous America. Guardians of the country in time of war, they took it upon themselves to act as caretakers of the peace. The skills they gained through the provisions of the GI Bill fueled and sustained the postwar boom.”⁶⁵ At home, much as they did during the war, they became quintessential American men, this time as husbands and fathers, economic providers, and productive political and economic citizens.

The Devolution of American Exceptionalism and its Corollaries

As for the government, the hegemonic position the United States took in the international system after the war had its only real military rival in the Soviet Union, seemingly proving the special nature of nation. The ideological incongruence between the countries and their inhabitants pitted them against each other. At home, Americans feared anything that even resembled communism. Politicians used fabricated stories of communistic tendencies to deem their opponents as “soft” on communism, a euphemism for their lack of masculinity.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ American journalist Tom Brokaw coined this term in his 1998 book *The Greatest Generation* (New York: Random House, 1998). Excellent discussions of this generation’s contributions to society, politics, and the economy can be found in Glenn C. Altschuler and Stuart Blumin, *The G.I. Bill: The New Deal for Veterans* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), Edward Humes, *Over Here: How the G.I. Bill Transformed the American Dream* (New York: Diversion, 2006), and Suzanne Mettler, *Soldiers to Citizens: The G.I. Bill and the Making of the Greatest Generation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

⁶⁵ Michael D. Gambone, *The Greatest Generation Comes Home: The Veteran in American Society* (College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 2005), 189.

⁶⁶ Two good monographs that deal with the topic of being soft on communism are K.A. Cuordileone, *American Manhood and American Political Culture in the Cold War* (New York: Routledge, 2005) and Robert D. Dean, *Imperial Brotherhood: Gender and the Making of Cold War Foreign Policy*

K.A. Cuordileone explains that this “preoccupation with masculine regeneration and toughness” did not originate simply with fears over communism; it “was the product of a singular historical moment in which a complex of shock-waves and circumstances . . . converged to summon a sense of beleaguered manhood in need of rehabilitation.”⁶⁷ Those issues included concerns of a standardized American identity, homosexuality, gender roles, economic overabundance, and global American power.⁶⁸ It was during this early post-war period that modern American conservatism took shape with its emphasis on tradition, national defense, and the destruction of the Communist enemy and its supposed American conspirators.

Internationally, Cold War tensions created a three-year military conflict in Korea that ended in a stalemate.⁶⁹ Americans often ignore this conflict and historians deemed it “The Forgotten War;” however, when the conflict was in progress, it certainly garnered a great deal of press coverage. The martial men who fought in this conflict had rather large shoes to fill when it came to the image of the American soldier and the military, and it would seem the unsuccessful outcome of their war could somehow tarnish the image of the martial man and the America military. Yet, in many ways, the conflict failed to

(Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001). Cuordileone deals with attacks on liberals, while Dean deals with attacks on Republicans and others by John Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson.

⁶⁷ K.A. Cuordileone, *American Manhood and American Political Culture in the Cold War*, 238.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 238.

⁶⁹ Bruce Cumings, *The Korean War: A History* (New York: Modern Library, 2010), David Halberstam, *The Coldest Winter: America and the Korean War* (New York: Hyperion, 2007), Wada Haruki, *The Korean War: An International History* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2014), and Max Hastings, *The Korean War* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987).

blemish either, and unlike the men who would fight in the next decade in Southeast Asia, Korean War soldiers found dishonor did not befall them.

According to Andrew Huebner, credit for this belongs to American journalists. Throughout the war, the media painted the picture that “despite being outnumbered, outgunned, and bone tired, American GIs were fighting heroically,” and were simply valorous “victims of circumstance.”⁷⁰ This representation to Huebner “added complexity to the warrior image. By showing a greater degree of discouragement, sorrow, agony, and fear, these image makers widened the definition of the masculine, American fighter.”⁷¹ This addition to the definition of the martial man faded quickly. In the next decade, the men who fought in similar circumstances in the Vietnam War were not as lucky to have their experiences portrayed by the press or accepted by the American public in the same way.

The political climate in Southeast Asia, a mix of nationalism and communism that the United States could never disassociate from the communism of the Stalin era and beyond, embroiled the country, its institutions, and its ideals in their greatest test. The United States, with its new powerful role as the leader of the Western World, saw the situation in Vietnam as dire. From 1956 through 1975, the United States spent money, gave military assistance, and then, eventually, joined in the fighting to prevent the

⁷⁰ Andrew J. Huebner, *The Warrior Image: Soldiers in American Culture from the Second World War to the Vietnam Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 103.

⁷¹ Ibid., 129

communist takeover of South Vietnam.⁷² The task seemed like an easy one for the greatest military power of the West.

Then, in the 1960s, the idyllic environment created in the 1950s with its suburbs, revolving credit, and picket fences, all courtesy of World War II prosperity, began to crumble. Of course, as Cuordileone pointed out, that fantasy never fully existed, and when it did, its participants were white, middle class families.⁷³ The true story of the 1950s involved increasing frustration, particularly among the African-American and female population.⁷⁴ The Civil Rights Movement questioned America's basic political values, while the second wave of feminism forced men and women to reexamine issues of gender inequality and sexuality. With these queries and their eventual demands came social instability, cultural reassessment, and political ramifications.

Many who believed in these changes began to question the government, leading to the largest anti-war movement the once isolationist United States ever encountered.⁷⁵ Protestors, in turn, created a sense among outsiders that the country's domestic problems would affect its international obligations. In a many ways, they did. Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon both made decisions about the war informed by concerns over the ever-

⁷² See the introduction of this dissertation for a listing of scholarly works on the Vietnam War.

⁷³ Elaine Tyler May dispels many of these myths in *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1988).

⁷⁴ An excellent discussion of the Civil Rights Movement after the Second World War is Steven F. Lawson, *Running for Freedom: Civil Rights and Black Politics in America Since 1941* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991). Another good overview is Bruce J. Dierenfield, *The Civil Rights Movement*, Revised Edition, (New York: Routledge, 2008).

⁷⁵ Good overviews of the anti-war movement are Adam Garfinkle, *Telltale Hearts: The Origins and Impact of the Vietnam Anti-War Movement* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995), Penny Lewis, *Hardhats, Hippies, and Hawks: The Vietnam Antiwar Movement as Myth and Memory* (Ithaca, ILR Press, 2013), and Melvin Small, *Antiwarriors: The Vietnam War and the Battle for America's Hearts and Minds* (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, 2002).

increasing negative opinion of it among the populace. Often, the main worry was what a loss in Vietnam would mean for American exceptionalism. All of this enraged American conservatives who rallied against the social and political climate, as well as the influence they had on political, foreign policy, and military decisions.

Moreover, the social and cultural changes of the 1960s exacerbated the crisis of manhood, one of the most important aspects of American power. The men fighting in Vietnam were losing, and the power of the men on the homefront began to wane. Long-held notions of American manhood, the concept's military ties, and its effect on the power of the United States seemed in jeopardy. The chaos of the era, according to Michael Kimmel, "provided a frontal assault on the traditional way that men had defined their manhood—against an other who was excluded from full humanity by being excluded from those places where men were real men."⁷⁶

By the time the country withdrew from the Vietnam War, having failed at its main objective to drive out communism and stop another domino from falling, as well as losing 58,000 military personnel in the process, the United States appeared both domestically and internationally weak. Many within the country, particularly conservative Republicans, believed that America needed to inflate its image. As Susan Jeffords suggests, "the stability of the ground on which patriarchal power rests was challenged" by the 1960s and a renegotiation would occur in the 1980s via "a revival of the images, abilities and evaluations of men and masculinity in dominant U.S. culture."⁷⁷

⁷⁶ Kimmel, 280.

⁷⁷ Susan Jeffords, *The Remasculinization of America: Gender and the Vietnam War*, (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1989), xii.

The chaos of the 1960s also challenged long-held traditions about the “specialness” of the United States and wounded the American military in a way that it had never previously known. Because of the significant role of the American military in gaining and maintaining the power and prestige of the United States, these wounds would have a considerable effect on its own confidence and its image in the eyes of the world. Conservative Republicans reeled from this loss of the country’s “specialness,” as promoted in the mythology so important to their ideology. The weakened view of the nation made them fear the collapse of American hegemony, leading various adherents to participate in a concerted campaign to shore up the long-established traditions and might of the American military, the country’s notions of martial manhood, and the idea of exceptionalism that they believed made the United States of America soar above all others.

CHAPTER THREE

RESTORING THE SACREDNESS OF MILITARY TRADITION: WILLIAM WESTMORELAND'S MISSION TO DELIVER THE AMERICAN MILITARY FROM THE VIETNAM WAR

“The Vietnam experience was, as President Reagan has described it, a ‘noble’ undertaking. Those who gave their full measure of devotion to the cause—both the living and the dead—have much to be proud of. Individually and collectively, they have earned the undying gratitude and respect of the vast majority of their countrymen, they were stouthearted men and women. They merit our understanding and deserve our respect.”

William Childs Westmoreland¹

On a spring morning in Chicago, Illinois, almost twenty years after the Tet Offensive, General William Westmoreland, once again, stood before a large contingent of soldiers. The men, now veterans, converged on the streets of the fabled Midwestern city for a “Welcome Home Parade,” meant to thank them for their service. For hours, an estimated 200,000 vets “some in civilian clothes and others in baggy fatigues and battered hats, bearded and long- haired,” many without limbs and the ability to walk paraded behind the former general and past half a million spectators.²

This was not the first much overdue “welcome home” parade orchestrated for Vietnam veterans in the 1980s. Just over a year earlier, a much less attended parade occurred in New York City, while smaller parades occurred around the country throughout the mid-1980s. It also was not Westmoreland’s first time serving as grand

¹ William Westmoreland, “The Myths, Illusions, and Realities of Vietnam,” File: “Speeches 1985: The Myths, Illusions, and Realities of ,” Box 49: Westmoreland Speeches, General (ca. 1984-ca. 1980s), *William C. Westmoreland Papers*, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina.

² Robert Davis et al, “Cheers, Tears, and ‘Welcome Home,’” *Chicago Tribune*. June 14, 1986.

marshal of such a parade. However, this one differed. The number of participants and spectators, and the warm reception for the veterans was equaled only by the dedication of the Vietnam Wall.³ The elderly Westmoreland's participation as the grand marshal of this moment of unprecedented public acceptance of the Vietnam veteran, stoically dressed in full military regalia, symbolically culminated close to two decades of service to his personal vision of redeeming the image of the war.

Westmoreland's ultimate objective, however, was not simply to alter the country's perspective on Vietnam. He wanted to stop the negative social and cultural drift toward the war's participants and the American military.⁴ If he could do this, he believed it would save the image of both, culminating in the salvation of the country's martial tradition and the notions of exceptionalism it conjured up. As Westmoreland knew, the public's perception of the armed forces influenced its numbers and its federal support, and any diminishment of its real or perceived supremacy affected the country's position as the leader of the free world. The general, a tried and true conservative, did not simply want to save the tradition that defined his life; he also wanted to protect American exceptionalism.⁵

³ At the National Salute to Veterans, the multi-day celebration dedicating the Vietnam Wall, Westmoreland led a large parade of veterans attending the event down Constitution Avenue in Washington, DC. Lewis Sorely, *Westmoreland: The General Who Lost Vietnam* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, Harcourt, 2011), 296.

⁴ Arnold R. Issacs presents the breakdown of American operations in Vietnam that helped create these perspectives in the book *Without Honor: Defeat in Vietnam and Cambodia* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983). As Andrew J. Bacevich states in *The New American Militarism: How Americans are Seduced by War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005) "The Army was all but destroyed [by Vietnam]—not only destroyed but also defeated and cast aside" due to its performance or the perception of its performance in Southeast Asia, 37.

⁵ Although Lewis Sorely hints that Westmoreland could not decide on which ticket he would run for governor of South Carolina (*Westmoreland: The General Who Lost Vietnam*, 267-269), it is clear Westmoreland's loyalty was with the Republican Party, especially considered who encouraged him to run:

Westmoreland started this process in the mid-1960s when he commanded U.S. military operations in Vietnam.⁶ It was then that he began to recognize a perceived lack of gratitude among the American populace for the servicemen fighting in the conflict. As divisions over the war intensified and contempt for its veterans and the military escalated, Westmoreland began a crusade to set the record straight and reaffirm American pride in its soldiers' sacrifices. By the mid-1980s, his earlier efforts converged with those of other conservatives to change how Americans viewed the veterans and their war, to salvage the historical image and traditions of the American military, and to re-establish the country's international strength.

The Making of a Loyal General and Adherent to the Military Tradition

On March 26, 1914, William Childs Westmoreland was born in Saxon, South Carolina to a multi-generational southern family whose American roots date to the 1650s. The first generation of Westmorelands arrived in Virginia in flight from England during the Civil War due to their martial support of King Charles I.⁷ The family became well-established in the American south, and, as Westmoreland biographer Samuel Zaffiri

Gerald Ford, Ronald Reagan, Strom Thurman, Charles Percy, and Nixon and Ford's Commerce Secretary Fred Dent, all Republicans, 268. Moreover, future GOP strategist Lee Atwater ran the petition campaign encouraging him to run for the office, 268.

⁶ A good overview of Westmoreland's time as commander of MACV can be found in Thomas E. Ricks, *The Generals: American Military Command from World War II to Today* (New York: Penguin Books, 2012), 231-292.

⁷ Samuel Zaffiri, *Westmoreland: A Biography of William C. Westmoreland* (New York: Morrow, 1994), 8.

notes, “there were Westmorelands in the Confederate Army from every southern state except Florida.”⁸

The South Carolina branch of the family tree, Westmoreland’s direct ancestors, arrived in the Piedmont in the early 1730s. Continentals in the Revolution, a choice rarely made by South Carolinians, during the Civil War they turned against the Union and fought for the Confederacy. After the war, they continued to celebrate the cause, attending reunions and participating in parades to honor Confederate veterans.⁹

Westmoreland’s father, sired by a man whose own father named him after Abraham Lincoln’s assassin, married into the Childs family, which had similar understandings of the Civil War. By the time the future general arrived, the once rather poor Westmoreland family had begun to rise in social and economic stature due to its coupling with the Childs.¹⁰ The new opportunities afforded them meant young William, who loved dressing in military uniforms and performing Cub Scout duties, held great promise for the family. His sister Margaret said “from day one they kept a tight rein on him and began inculcating him with the idea that he was something very special.”¹¹

The first institution to which he gave his allegiance was the Boy Scouts of America. Being a scout was a role he took seriously and at which he excelled through his teenage years.¹² However, it was the Army that would become his lifelong love. As

⁸ Ibid., 8.

⁹ Ibid. 9-15

¹⁰ Ibid. 17-20.

¹¹ Ibid. 20

¹² Lewis Sorely, *Westmoreland: The General Who Lost Vietnam*, 2-3. In *Manhood in America: A Cultural History*, Michael Kimmel presents an interesting discussion about the effects of the Boy Scouts of

Samuel Zaffiri claims, the future general's father often drilled Robert E. Lee's famous words "duty is the sublimest word in the English language" into young William's head.¹³ This lesson in masculine responsibility influenced his future desire to attend some form of military school after he graduated from high school. While he hoped to attend the Naval Academy, South Carolina Senator James F. Byrnes, a family friend, convinced Westmoreland that he needed a less "technical" curriculum in order to be successful.¹⁴

He enrolled at the Citadel and went on to make an indelible impression on his classmates there, as well as on his instructors—well-experienced men who knew the characteristics needed to succeed in the military. The instructors and administrators pegged him as leadership material early on, and by the end of his nine month initial training period, they listed him first out of a ranking of ninety-six students for promotion.¹⁵

The future general's outstanding performance at the Citadel gave him the opportunity to transfer to West Point, where many faculty members praised him as "one of the most outstanding" new cadets. The Class of 1936, whose commencement speaker

America on the men of the country. Although he acknowledges these effects were well beyond the original purposes desires by its founder Ernest Thompson Seaton, who was "antimilitaristic," Kimmel suggests the real effects of the Boys Scouts were in line with its English founder Lord Baden-Powell who "stressed a kind of obedient and patriotic masculinity," 168, a "patriotic youth brigade," 169. The full discussion on the Boy Scouts is found on pages 167-171.

¹³ Zaffiri, *Westmoreland*, 22 contains Lee quote. This quote is from a letter General Lee supposedly wrote to his son, G. W. Custis Lee in 1852, which was published by the *New York Sun* on November 26, 1864. For over a century many have disputed the authenticity of the letter, an issue raised in 1914 by Professor Charles A. Graves from the University of Virginia Law School. Graves concluded Lee did not make this statement based on significant research and analysis. His paper, "The Forged Letter of General Robert E. Lee," can be accessed on the Washington and Lee University website, http://leearchive.wlu.edu/reference/addresses/graves/01_index.html.

¹⁴ Sorely, *Westmoreland*, 3-4.

¹⁵ Zaffiri, *Westmoreland*, 27-32.

was General Pershing, boasted a wide array of eventually preeminent men with whom Westmoreland had no problem competing.¹⁶ A confident cadet, who took the motto of duty, honor, country to heart, Westmoreland ended up receiving the “Pershing Sword” from the man himself at graduation, indicating that he “surpassed all others in military proficiency” during his time at the academy.¹⁷

Before World War II, Westmoreland spent two years in Hawaii, coming back to Fort Bragg, North Carolina just a few months before Pearl Harbor.¹⁸ His participation in World War II began in North Africa as the commander of the 34th Field Artillery Battalion of the 9th Infantry Division and continued in Italy. He rose to become Chief of Staff of that infantry during its time in France and Germany.¹⁹ However, it was his role in the Vietnam War, twenty years later, as the commander of the United States’ Military and Assistance Command in Vietnam (MACV) that defined his career and the rest of his life.

Image is Everything: Shoring up America’s Perception of the Military

As the commanding general of American operations in Vietnam from 1964-1968, Westmoreland believed he “owed it to history” to provide the American public with the

¹⁶ Ibid., 33-34.

¹⁷ Ibid., 42.

¹⁸ Sorely, *Westmoreland*, 12.

¹⁹ Ibid., 14-24. Westmoreland discusses his time in the European Theater of World War II operations in his career autobiography *A Soldier Reports* (New York: Doubleday, 1976), 9-24.

story of the Vietnam War as he understood it.²⁰ Early on, even while he was “in country,” he focused on how the public perceived the soldiers in the conflict, especially as the public’s support of the troops serving in Vietnam waned. As Americans’ feelings about the Vietnam conflict fractured under the pressure of social and cultural upheaval and undermined the military, the general went into full protection mode for the institution and the war’s participants. As the war progressed, he sensed there would be an image issue for those who served. Ideas of how to respond began percolating.

Westmoreland tested a theme in the spring of 1967 that eventually matured into a full-fledged crusade to change the image of the Vietnam veteran. In a statement read to the Ohio Veterans of Foreign War (VFW), Westmoreland presented a “proud father” stance toward his men he would never relinquish. Homing in on three tenets of the martial tradition, “Duty, Honor, Country,” he desperately tried to communicate that there was honor in the deeds of men serving in an unpopular conflict.²¹ He proclaimed to his comrades in the VFW, “I wish all of you could see, as I am privileged to see, how magnificently these young Americans are performing here. They are truly inspiring. They are aggressive and courageous...They are dedicated to the service of their nation and the cause we serve in Vietnam—the cause of freedom.”²² To the veterans he declared these

²⁰ “Overextension Called War Cause,” File:Clippings, Topical, Education 1970s, Box 65: Westmoreland: Miscellaneous, 1970-1993, *William C. Westmoreland Papers*, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina.

²¹ “Duty, Honor, Country” is the motto of the United States Military Academy, commonly known as West Point.

²² From statement sent and read to Ohio chapter of the Military Order of the Cootie an auxiliary of the Veterans of Foreign Wars. Attached to “Letter from Westmoreland to Paul S. Plunkett, May 16, 1967,” File: Personal Papers, Topical, Veterans Activities, V of FW (1964-1980), Box: 37, Westmoreland Personal Papers, Veterans Activities, *William C. Westmoreland Papers*, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina.

men as their martial equals who represented the best of the U.S. military and America's male population.

By late 1967, Westmoreland realized the controversial nature of the war created reintegration difficulties for returning servicemen and that their image and Americans' opinions about the military would need strengthening.²³ He enlisted Congressman John Marsh (D-VA), who visited American bases in Southeast Asia, to work on a coordinated, non-governmental effort to welcome Vietnam veterans home. Marsh eventually spearheaded a program to honor the returning serviceman called 'Operation Gratitude.'²⁴ The Virginia Jaycees pilot project, which mirrored later efforts of the Vietnam Veterans Leadership Program, mixed propaganda and veteran appreciation. Coordinated community outreach events arose to promote awareness of the soldiers' "sacrifice," to explain the reasons behind the war, and to give citizens the chance to express their gratitude to the veterans.²⁵

When he asked Marsh to work on these issues, Westmoreland had not seen the worst of the Vietnam conflict or its damage to his beloved military. The infamous Tet

²³A strong work on the reception of Vietnam veterans upon their return home is Bob Greene's *Homecoming: When the Soldiers Returned from Vietnam* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1989). Although some, such as sociologist Jerry Lembecke, *The Spitting Image: Myth, Memory, and the Legacy of Vietnam* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), dispute the claims of Greene and his subjects that Americans spit on Vietnam veterans after they returned home, the book still offers a strong examination of American treatment of veterans from the veterans perspectives.

²⁴ Marsh's hope for Letter "Letter from John O. Marsh to William Westmoreland, March 8, 1968," File: Military Papers, General, 1-19 March 1968, Box: 6, Westmoreland, Military History, *William C. Westmoreland Papers*, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina.

²⁵ From a list of objectives for the program Operation Gratitude sent to Westmoreland by Congressman John O. Marsh, Jr. March 8, 1968. File: Military Papers, General, 1-19 March 1968, Box 6: Westmoreland, Military History, *William C. Westmoreland Papers*, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina. Westmoreland also retained multiple clippings from the "opening" of the program in this same file including "Marsh Urges Communities to Honor Returning G.I.'s," Thursday December 21, 1967, "Operation: 'Gratitude' Aimed at Vietnam Vets," Virginia Jaycee New Dominion, February 1968; "Jaycees Honor Veterans," Winchester Evening Star, Wednesday, February 28, 1968.

Offensive in the first weeks of 1968, regardless of its complicated outcome, destroyed many Americans' faith in their political and military institutions.²⁶ While President Johnson had already decided in late 1967 to replace Westmoreland, the timing of his removal in June 1968 coincided with Tet, tarnishing his image.²⁷

Returning home somewhat disgraced, Westmoreland accepted an appointment as Army Chief of Staff in July of 1968. During his four-year tenure, he attempted to strengthen the image of the American military. A major part of his efforts coincided with a push throughout the military to bring respect back to military service, to re-establish active soldiers' pride in their duties and institution, and to entice young men to join.²⁸

Westmoreland conveyed his logistical "philosophy for continuing the work of the Army" to the attendees of the Army Commanders' Conference in December 1968. He stressed his four M's for the branch—Mission, Motivation, Modernization, and Management.²⁹ He wanted to bolster those already in the army, but he also sought to

²⁶ George C. Herring, *America's Longest War: The United States and Vietnam, 1950-1975*, 4th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2002), 225-268 and Stanley Karnow, *Vietnam: A History* (New York: Viking Press, 1983), 515-556 contain good overview discussions of the Tet Offensive and its effects. A more specific examination of the offensive is James H. Willbanks, *The Tet Offensive: A Concise History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), while an examination of the effects of Tet on public opinion can be found in David F. Schmitz, *The Tet Offensive: Politics, War, and Public Opinion* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc, 2005).

²⁷ Lewis Sorely presents the story that Westmoreland's removal from as commander of MACV occurred because the Johnson administration wanted someone "with a more agile, creative mind." Johnson and his advisers had made the decision in 1967, *Westmoreland: The General Who Lost Vietnam*, 199.

²⁸ "Memo from Westmoreland to Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird, August 5, 1969." File: Military Papers General, 1-14 August 1969, Box 8: "Military Papers, General (June 1969-March 1970), William C. Westmoreland Papers, South Carolinian Library, University of South Carolina. In the memo "People Objectives—Department of Defense" the department's objectives are "to enhance the image and content of the military career" in order create for "the serviceman of pride in himself, his uniform, and his profession."

²⁹ "Letter from William Westmoreland to General Earle Wheeler, November 30, 1968," File: Military Papers, General, November 1968, Box 7: Military Papers, General (15 July 1968-July 1969), William C. Westmoreland Papers, South Carolinian Library, University of South Carolina.

polish its tarnished image and bring others into the fold.³⁰ He boasted to those attending that “[t]he Army has responded magnificently to the challenge of Vietnam,” but stressed that it was an institution “in transition in a society in transition.” In order to combat societal change, the army needed to focus on “the continued enhancement of the dignity, pride, and motivation of the members of the Army,” while working “to increase the attractiveness of service” among the general male population. The key was to cast “the Army image in a light that will engender a high degree of public respect and appreciation for the Army’s vital contributions in securing the national objectives.”³¹

When Westmoreland’s role as Army Chief of Staff ended and he retired from the Army in the spring of 1972, he believed the institution had fixed itself internally, but not necessarily publically. He informed President Nixon in his final Army status report that Vietnam had forced the Army to deal with “unique difficulties” and “unprecedented challenges.” Even though he “pushed to restore traditionally high Army standards” and re-established soldiers “professionalism, discipline, and morale,” Americans’ still had a low opinion of their national army, and he resented it.³²

The general held a skewed view of why the American public held the military in such low esteem. He felt their opinion stemmed from a mistaken focus on the appalling

³⁰ “Memo from William Westmoreland to Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird, August 5, 1969” In the memo for Sec of Defense, People in the Defense Department, August 5, 1969, Westmoreland indicates that “a sharp improvement in our image” is needed to “attract and sustain a properly trained force.”

³¹ “Letter from William Westmoreland to the Major Commanders operating under the Chief of Staff and Senior Officers Serving in a Joint Command”, November 30, 1968, File: Military Papers, General, November 1968, Box 7: Military Papers, General (15 July 1968-July 1969), *William C. Westmoreland Papers*, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina.

³² “Letter from William Westmoreland to President Richard Nixon, June 30, 1972,” File: Military Papers, General, 29-30 June 1972, Box 11: Military Papers, General, (March-Dec 1972), *William C. Westmoreland Papers*, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina.

behavior of a few soldiers in the war, rather than on the nobility of the many and the institution.³³ These indiscretions, he claimed about six months before his retirement, obscured the courageous and dedicated efforts of the great majority of our fighting men.”³⁴

His frustration with the American public’s opinions also came up in Westmoreland’s final letter to Nixon with the accusation that Americans had overblown these “transgressions of a few” and transferred them to the institution. He pleaded with the president to make the next goal of the army a ramping up of his efforts to change its image among the country’s citizens. Among other things, it would enhance the military’s ability to prepare for the next conflict.³⁵

The general also commented on a topic that became the center of his post-retirement efforts to heal the wounds of the American military. He declared to Nixon that the men who participated in the war deserved and needed acknowledgment for their nobility and dedication to American efforts in Vietnam. Westmoreland believed that such recognition must have a strong link to the army itself, so no further doubts existed as to its capabilities.³⁶ After leaving his position within the Nixon administration and

³³ Myra McPherson examines atrocities committed by Vietnam veterans in *Long Time Passing: Vietnam and the Haunted Generation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001) on pages 481-511. William T. Allison examines My Lai and its effects in significant depth in *My Lai: An American Atrocity in the Vietnam War* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012). Veteran George Lepre discusses fragging and other atrocities in *Fragging: Why U.S. Soldiers Assaulted Their Officers in Vietnam* (Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 2011).

³⁴ “Letter from William Westmoreland to Thomas Jay Hudson, November 26, 1971,” File: Military Papers, General, 15-30 November, Box 10: Military Papers, General, (March 1971-Feb 1972), *William C. Westmoreland Papers*, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina.

³⁵ “Letter from Westmoreland to President Nixon, June 30, 1972.”

³⁶ Ibid.

settling into civilian life, Westmoreland eventually made changing the impression Americans had of the military's role in Vietnam his defining quest.

Revisionism: Controlling the History of the Military's Role in the War

Directly after he retired, Westmoreland at first spent little time on changing perceptions of the war, and this was likely due to his unsuccessful run for governor of South Carolina.³⁷ The topic often arose during his bid for office, but the message lacked the focus it manifested later. However, with the release of the American prisoners of war in 1973, Westmoreland mentioned his hope that their freedom and the "excellent impression" they made on the American people would help change attitudes.³⁸ He commented "someday, and it may be soon, the American people will appreciate the excellent job done by their military representatives in Southeast Asia."³⁹

³⁷ Lewis Sorely discusses Westmoreland's gubernatorial run in *Westmoreland: The General Who Lost Vietnam*, 267-277.

³⁸ A strong examination of the history of American prisoners of War in Southeast Asia is Frederick Kiley and Stuart I. Rochester, *Honor Bound : The History of American Prisoners of War in Southeast Asia, 1961-1973* (Washington, DC: Office of the Secretary of Defense, Historical Studies, 2013). Monika Jensen-Stevenson and William H. Stevenson counter some of the government's contentions in *Kiss the Boys Goodbye: How the United States Betrayed Its Own POWs in Vietnam* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1990). They contend the United States in its quest to maintain its position in the war with the American people and to keep certain government secrets from coming to light left the POWs in captivity for as long as possible.

³⁹ The quote "excellent impression" from "Letter from William Westmoreland to 'Verne,' April 13, 1973," File: Personal Papers, General, April 1973, Box 14: Military Papers, General, (March 1971-Feb 1972), *William C. Westmoreland Papers*, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina. Appreciation quote from "Letter from General William Westmoreland to Richard Nixon, February 21, 1973," Box 10: Military Papers, General, (March 1971-Feb 1972), *William C. Westmoreland Papers*, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina. He suggested their release, as well as their behavior upon release, "provided prestige for the Armed Forces," and "a boost to the morale of all Americans." "Letter from William Westmoreland to 'Verne,' March 6, 1973." Box 10: Military Papers, General, (March 1971-Feb 1972), *William C. Westmoreland Papers*, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina. In the same letter, he says: "The entire country can be proud of the appearance and attitude of the POWs thus far. Hopefully, those that follow will give the same favorable impression."

Beyond that, he did not make a significant effort in the direction of revising public understandings of the war until the late 1970s. Once the general started, however, he rarely slowed down until age began to catch up with him. One of the most important issues that needed addressing, according to Westmoreland, was the media's role in creating an erroneous history of the war.⁴⁰

This subject first appeared during his tenure as commander of MACV, as he often criticized media coverage of events as “confused news accounts” that would prevent anyone from forming “a true understanding of the situation.”⁴¹ As time moved on and his career and reputation suffered from poor public opinion, he became fixated on the idea that he should step forward and be the voice of the war and his men. His desire to shape the legacy of the war appears in an editorial he wrote in late 1970 in which he worried praise for the army from future “objective historians” might “be too late.”⁴² Instead of

⁴⁰ Historian William M. Hammond argues in *Reporting Vietnam: The Media and Military at War* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1998) that in the early years of the war the media and the United States government had similar understandings and objectives regarding the conflict. However, in the late 1960s the tide turned with in the field reporting and the changes in public opinion influencing the media's understandings and support of the war. Clarence Wyatt's *Paper Soldiers: The American Press and the Vietnam War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993) also suggests the first part of this story, but it does not see the same alteration of thoughts. Communications professor Daniel C. Hallin, *The Uncensored War: The Media and the Vietnam War* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989) was one of the first to discuss Hammond's eventual argument. This author also contends that it was only after the war became contentious among the public that the media turned on it. It is important to note that reporting was typically accurate, but played up the low points of the war in later years, rather than giving in to governmental explanations of it, an analysis of the powers that be that reflected that exact trend in the public.

⁴¹ “Letter from William Westmoreland to Lt. Gen. James M. Gavin, August 6, 1967,” File: Military Papers, General, 1-19 August 1967, Box 6: Westmoreland, Military History *William C. Westmoreland Papers*, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina.

⁴² Editorial is attached to a letter written by Westmoreland to H. Ross Perot on Nov. 6, 1970, File: Personal Papers, Topical, Writings, General, 1966-1972, Box 39 Westmoreland Personal Papers, Topical, *William C. Westmoreland Papers*, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina. Robert Schulzinger discusses the issue of historical revisionism and the Vietnam War in *A Time for Peace: The Legacy of the Vietnam War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 188-191. Although some who worked on revising the war were historians, others like Westmoreland had military connections. The most prominent example of this military revisionism is Harry G. Summers, *On Strategy: A Critical Analysis of*

relying on those historians who might never come or who might be ignored,

Westmoreland decided to take up the mantle himself, even before the conflict ended.⁴³

In the editorial, Westmoreland outlined what would become the main points of his efforts to shape Americans' understandings of the Vietnam War and salvage the military institution. He argued for focusing on the importance of the army's "overall performance," its truly remarkable performance in "carrying out the directions...under most difficult and trying conditions," and its major successes in holding off the Viet Cong and the Army of North Vietnam, rather than on possible mistakes and "the inferior performance of a few senior officers and NCOs." The military, to him, had accomplished all of this "despite opposition, the incredible personal turbulence, the dissent, the lack of U.S. mobilization, the race problems, and the attitudes that have pervaded the Nation during the past few years." Westmoreland found he needed to address these issues continuously, regardless of the forum. The fact that Vietnam remained a point of discussion made him believe, "blame has been firmly placed [sic], lessons have been learned, some heeded."⁴⁴

In 1978, the general began making speeches on college campuses throughout the country and before veterans' organizations that concentrated on how to revise negative

the Vietnam War (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1983). Summers is one of the main proponents of placing blame on the inept leadership of civilians within the Johnson administration, rather than placing significant blame on the military and its leadership. The book became a conservative staple in the war to level blame on liberals for the mishandling of the war.

⁴³ Other instances of revisionism include political intellectual Norman Podhoretz's *Why We Were in Vietnam* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982), which blamed the anti-war movement for the loss.

⁴⁴ Editorial attached to a letter written by Westmoreland to H. Ross Perot on Nov. 6, 1970. File: Personal Papers, Topical, Writings, General, 1966-1972, Box 39 Westmoreland Personal Papers, Topical, *William C. Westmoreland Papers*, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina.

understandings of the military's participation in Vietnam. One of his major speeches was "The TET Offensive and the Escalation of the Vietnam War, 1965-1968." In it, he acknowledged that the war had been a "shabby performance by America, a blemish on our history, and a possible blight on our future." But he also refused to blame the military or the majority of its members for these issues, suggesting that poor domestic and military choices by political leaders had weakened the war effort, while college deferments that were "discriminatory and undemocratic" had created "substandard officers" and led to "marginal types" who created situations like My Lai.⁴⁵

Although Westmoreland made public statements in the late 1970s suggesting he hoped "history will put the matter into accurate perspective," he wanted to speed up the process rather than let things work themselves out.⁴⁶ He based his reasoning for moving forward on the proliferation of "distorted 'historical' accounts" of the conflict. One of those came about in 1978, in a "Reader's Digest" collection named *Great Events of the 20th Century and How They Changed Our Lives*. Its chapter "1964 – Vietnam: The Bitter

⁴⁵ William Westmoreland, "The TET Offensive and the Escalation of the Vietnam War, 1965-1968, University of North Carolina Chapel Hill, February 19-22, 1978," File: Speeches, General, 1978, Feb 19-22, 'The TET Offensive and the Escalation of the Vietnam War, 1965-1968,' delivered to UNC, Box 47: Speeches, General, (1978-1980), *William C. Westmoreland Papers*, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina. The poor military choices to which Westmoreland refers may have been Project 100,000, created by Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara on the advisement of individuals like Democratic senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan. The program allowed those who failed their military qualification test to join the military and work toward meeting those qualifications. Many considered this a weakening of the military, while others viewed it as racial and class discrimination, placing the burden of the war on a very specific group of minority Americans. A discussion of these issues are found in Kyle Longley, *Grunts: The American Combat Soldier in Vietnam* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2008), 7-11. A full-length discussion of draft inequities can be found in Christian G. Appy, *Working Class War: American Combat Soldiers in Vietnam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993).

⁴⁶ Ibid.

Ordeal” disturbed Westmoreland greatly because he believed it contained false information.⁴⁷

Given that a well-circulated periodical with “a reputation for accuracy and objectivity” published the book, it prompted Westmoreland to launch a letter writing campaign to force a review by the publisher.⁴⁸ He explained to a former colleague that if veterans made it a point to “express our disapproval of accounts based on uninformed opinion, it could have a salutary effect.”⁴⁹

Westmoreland’s desire to control the portrayal of the war came on the heels of his book *A Soldier Reports*, released in 1976.⁵⁰ Although he “felt he owed it to history to tell [the] story” of the war through his eyes and the eyes of the military, the continued publication of articles and books that did not present the war in the way he wanted reinforced his belief that he and other senior officers needed to get their story out to the public. To General William E. DePuy, he wrote that they owed it to their men “to bring forth the facts and raise them above propaganda.” He remarked to DePuy that “Misleading ‘history’ is but another slap at the morale of the poorly informed soldier,

⁴⁷ Reader’s Digest, *Great Events of the Twentieth Century and How They Changed Our Lives* (Reader’s Digest, 1977). Out of print.

⁴⁸ “Letter to from William Westmoreland to General William E. DePuy, March 4, 1978,” File: Personal Papers, General, March-April, 1978, Box 16: Personal Papers, *William C. Westmoreland Papers*, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina.

⁴⁹ “Letter from William Westmoreland to General William B. Rosson, January 28, 1978,” File: Personal Papers, General, January-February, 1978, Box 16: Personal Papers, *William C. Westmoreland Papers*, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina.

⁵⁰ William C. Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports*.

sailor, marine, or airman. You and I can help hasten the process of setting the record straight...and at the same time maintain a soldierly stance.”⁵¹

With or without assistance from his former colleagues, Westmoreland continued taking a stab at revisionist history during his speeches at colleges throughout the United States. In late 1978, he arrived at the University of Nebraska to give an oft-made speech, ‘Vietnam in Perspective.’ He lectured the crowd of professors, students, and ROTC members, giving typical talking points of how the media gave “distorted, misleading, and irresponsible” reports that undermined the military, while traitorous war protestors encouraged the Vietnamese enemy to keep fighting.

But many in the audience, which exceeded the allotted seating, gave him a chilly reception. Some booed, anti-war demonstrators carried signs and shouted anti-war slogans, and someone called in a bomb threat. The majority of the audience found his revisionism unimpressive. As interruptions continued, Westmoreland countered, “I’ve talked at about 30 campuses in the past four years, but I’ve never had one quite like this. I guess this place isn’t as conservative as I thought.”⁵²

A few months later, when addressing a crowd at the more conservative Dartmouth College, he “received a warm welcome and extended ovation when he finished.” But he continued to receive challenges from “a substantial part of the audience.” After his appearance, he reiterated his speech’s revisionism to the college’s newspaper, *The*

⁵¹ “Letter to from William Westmoreland to General William E. DePuy, March 4, 1978,” File: Personal Papers, General, March-April, 1978, Box 16: Personal Papers, *William C. Westmoreland Papers*, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina.

⁵² Joe Starita, “Westmoreland addresses chanting, booing crowd,” *Lincoln Journal*, October 14, 1978, found in File: Clippings, Topical, Education, 1970s, Box 65: *William C. Westmoreland Papers*, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina.

Dartmouth, complaining that the American media bore responsibility, coupled with “certain elements in this society.” To him, they undermined the war effort and “did everything they could to degrade the man in uniform.” The opinion of the “current generation,” which he encountered during his speeches, absorbed all of this propaganda, according to him, explaining why they attacked him so much.⁵³

By 1980, he began to argue that a reexamination of the war was in fact underway but somewhat stretched the truth when he suggested, “the situation is now being seen in a more accurate perspective.”⁵⁴ In October 1980, he told talk show host Phil Donahue, “Revisionism is underway. As I speak on college campuses, which I do frequently, a changed mood is much in evidence. Meanwhile there is a decided shift in public attitudes toward the Vietnam veteran.” An unconvinced Donahue denied his request to reappear on the journalist’s popular talk show to discuss this new “development and trend” in American perspectives of the war, as well as to promote the paperback version of his best-selling *A Soldier Reports*.⁵⁵

For the next few years, Westmoreland continued on the speaking circuit, but he shifted his focus from unfriendly college campuses to dedications of war memorials and other military-friendly events. At one dedication, a year before the opening of the

⁵³ Scott Baker, “Westmoreland blames defeat in Vietnam on ‘Reds’ propaganda,” *The Dartmouth*, April 26, 1979, found in File: Clippings, Topical, Education, 1970s, Box 65: *William C. Westmoreland Papers*, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina.

⁵⁴ “Letter from William Westmoreland to Christopher Parsons, November 30, 1980,” File: Personal Papers, General, October- December 1980, Box 16: Westmoreland Papers, *William C. Westmoreland Papers*, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina.

⁵⁵ “Letter from William Westmoreland to Phil Donahue, October 19, 1980,” File: Personal Papers, General, October- December 1980, Box 16: Westmoreland Papers, *William C. Westmoreland Papers*, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina.

national Vietnam Veterans Memorial, Westmoreland proclaimed, “I am particularly proud of speaking for the Vietnam veteran. Few have had the anguish that has been mine for that man and woman who did in Vietnam what the leadership of the country asked them to do and did it well.” He lamented, “in return these men and women have been ignored and often abused by their fellow countrymen and neglected by their Nation.”⁵⁶ This statement marked a change in his rhetoric that as well. Although he never gave up on refashioning the image of the military and revising the history of the war, his campaign took a different and more successful turn in the early 1980s, concentrating on the reshaping the image of Vietnam veterans.

The Valorous Man: Redeeming the Image of the Vietnam Veteran to Salvage the Martial Tradition

In the matter of polishing the image of the American military and its members, Westmoreland had a kindred spirit in Ronald Reagan, whom he strongly supported and stumped for during the presidential campaign of 1980. Reagan’s Secretary of Defense, Casper Weinberger, wrote to him near the end of the president’s first term, lauding the great strides made by the administration’s campaign to re-strengthen the American military. Not only was Weinberger happy with “the progress we have made in restoring

⁵⁶ William Westmoreland, “Address at the Dedication Ceremony, Virginia War Memorial, November 11, 1981,” File: 20 Nov. 1981, Dedication Ceremony, Virginia War Memorial, Box 48: Westmoreland Speeches, General (1981 20 August-1984), *William C. Westmoreland Papers*, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina, “Dedication of Memorial to the Vietnam Veterans of Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, June 9, 1985,” File: 9 June 1985, Dedication to the Memorial to the Vietnam Veterans of Harrisburg, PA Box 49: Westmoreland Speeches, General (ca. 1984-ca. 1980s), *William C. Westmoreland Papers*, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina, “VVLP Dinner, Orlando, Florida, June 14, 1985,” File: 1985, June 14 Speech, VVLP Dinner, Box 49: Westmoreland Speeches, General (ca. 1984-ca. 1980s), *William C. Westmoreland Papers*, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina.

the pride and performance of our people in uniform,” but he also reported on the rise in “recruitment and retention” that he felt illustrated “a renewed respect for the honor of a military career.”⁵⁷

An element of that change had much to do with the efforts of people like Westmoreland, particularly after the focus of their public campaigns turned away from buttressing the war itself and toward highlighting the valor of the conflict’s participants.

When the thought of a national memorial commemorating America’s role in the Vietnam War came about in the late 1970s, Westmoreland had already spent years supporting various smaller ones around the country honoring soldiers who died in the Vietnam War. Beginning in the late 1960s, veterans groups, city councils, and even the parents of those who served, worked in their local communities to create monuments for those who made this ultimate sacrifice; Westmoreland rarely missed a chance to lend his support.⁵⁸ The creation of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial was no different.

The general’s desire to support a national project stemmed from his belief that a memorial supported by “prominent Americans of diverse backgrounds” might actually bring the country together. He had great faith in the all-encompassing nature of a “patriotic project” like the Wall that would be “a memorial to the American Vietnam

⁵⁷ “Letter from Secretary of Defense Casper Weinberger to William Westmoreland, January 3, 1984,” File: Personal Papers, General, 1984, Box 17: Personal Papers, Aug 1982-1993, *William C. Westmoreland Papers*, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina. In late 1983, the Defense Department reported it had “its best recruiting year ever.” The Assistant Secretary of Defense, Larry Korb, cited increased pay, better quality of life in the service, and “a renewed spirit of patriotism” for this surge. “U.S. Military Reports Best Recruitment Year,” *New York Times*, November 23, 1983. The assistant secretary’s points coincide with efforts by all branches of service in the mid to late 1970s to create a less restrictive daily life, increase salaries, and enhance benefits.

⁵⁸ Patrick Hagopian documents the number of Vietnam memorials built in the United States from the late 1960s to the present day in *The Vietnam, War in American Memory: Veterans, Memorials, and the Politics of Healing*, (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2009), 5-7. The first memorial was erected in Chicago in 1966. His personal count to date is 461.

Veterans who made the supreme sacrifice” and would “become an appropriate tribute to all” who served.⁵⁹ Consequently, he quickly moved to support the efforts of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund (VVMF) in order to solidify the war’s place in the annals of history.

In the spring of 1980, Westmoreland presented unsolicited financial and moral support to the VVMF, which eventually built the Vietnam Wall.⁶⁰ He wrote the fund’s president and founder Jan C. Scruggs to express his desire to assist in any way he could. He congratulated Scruggs on his initial victory to start the project, offered one of the first contributions to the official fund, and stressed to the former grunt, “if you believe my association could contribute to the success of the fund, please do not hesitate to contact me.”⁶¹

Scruggs jumped at the chance to have the retired general on board with the project and quickly wrote him back, thanking him for his contribution and his desire to assist. He praised him as “the first high ranking military officer to write to us offering to help,” a role he said was not surprising, as it was “consistent with the kind of leadership you

⁵⁹ “Letter from William Westmoreland to Jan Scruggs, December 1982,” File: Personal Papers, Topical, Veterans Activities, Memorials, 1967-1980, Box 36: Personal Papers, Topical Veterans Activities, Memorial, *William C. Westmoreland Papers*, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina.

⁶⁰ A contemporary account of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund and the creation of the Wall is found in Jan C. Scruggs and Joel L. Swerdlow, *To Heal A Nation: The Vietnam Veterans Memorial* (New York: Harper and Row, 1985). Discussions of the Wall and its effect on American society can be found in Kristin Ann Hass, *Carried to the Wall: American Memory and the Vietnam Veterans Memorial* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998) and Marita Sturken, *Tangled Memories: The Vietnam War, the AIDS Epidemic, and the Politics of Remembering* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

⁶¹ “Letter from William Westmoreland to Jan Scruggs, June 7, 1980,” File: National Sponsoring Committee, Westmoreland, William C. 1980-1984, Box 27: Office Files: 1979-1985, *Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund Records, 1965-1994*, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

showed during those painful years of Vietnam.”⁶² By the end of the year, Westmoreland had become a prominent part of the effort to build the Wall, lending his name to fundraising letters, including one sent to his West Point classmates; soliciting contributions on his own; and becoming a member of the VVMF’s National Sponsoring Committee along with Gerald Ford, Barry Goldwater, and Bob Hope.⁶³

A few months later, Scruggs wrote to Westmoreland, “Although the peculiar political and historical situation denied you the victory that could have been won, this memorial is not quite as encumbered by the difficulties inherent in the war.”⁶⁴ However, Scruggs was wrong. When the VVMF unveiled the design for the memorial in late 1981, the uproar over its design threatened its existence.⁶⁵ Artist Maya Lin’s concept presented the memorial as two slabs of black granite embedded into the ground and engraved with the names all who perished in the war. Many conservatives opposed her plan for the

⁶² “Letter from Jan Scruggs to William Westmoreland, June 19, 1980,” File: Personal Papers, Topical, Veterans Activities, Memorials, 1967-1980, Box 36: Personal Papers, Topical Veterans Activities, Memorial, *William C. Westmoreland Papers*, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina.

⁶³ Westmoreland’s acceptance of serving on committee, “Letter from William Westmoreland to Jan Scruggs, August 22, 1980,” and “Letter from Westmoreland to Classmates, October 6, 1980,” both documents from File: National Sponsoring Committee, Westmoreland, William C. 1980-1984, Box 27: Office Files: 1979-1985, *Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund Records, 1965-1994*, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

⁶⁴ “Letter from Jan Scruggs to William Westmoreland October 16, 1980,” File: Personal Papers, Topical, Veterans Activities, Memorials, 1967-1980, Box 36: Personal Papers, Topical Veterans Activities, Memorial, *William C. Westmoreland Papers*, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina.

⁶⁵ The uproar over the design is documented in detailed form throughout this dissertation, particularly in the chapter on James Webb. The major contemporary editorials condemning the design are Buchanan, Patrick J. “The Crypt on the Mall.” January 20, 1982, Folder: Natural Resources-PARKS-Vietnam Memorial [1of3]. Box 28: Collection Boggs, Danny: Files, Contents OA 11961. LOC 135/07/8. *Ronald Reagan Presidential Library*. Tom Carhart, “Insulting Vietnam Vets,” *New York Times*, October 24, 1981; James Webb, “Reassessing the Vietnam Veterans Memorial,” *Wall Street Journal*, December 18, 1981.

memorial, which they found disrespectful. They believed Westmoreland might feel the same way about what they described as “the black gash of shame.”⁶⁶

Many of those conservatives wanted Westmoreland’s support to alter aspects of Maya Lin’s design or even to withdraw his approval for the entire project. Former Marine James Webb was one of them. A member of the original group of individuals who sought federal authorization of a memorial on the Washington Mall, he wrote to Westmoreland in late 1981. Webb told the general it would be “beyond my conscience,” to remain a part of the VVMF because the project had become “at best a memorial to those who died, and in my opinion, a nihilistic political statement regarding the war.” Webb’s suggested changes of the addition of “an American flag at the juncture of the two Walls of the memorial, a change in the color to white, bringing it above ground, and listing the names in chronological order” had been denied by the VVMF, and Webb quickly decided to withdraw his support.⁶⁷ He wanted Westmoreland to do the same.

When conservative veteran Tom Carhart, who vehemently opposed Lin’s design, contacted Westmoreland only a few weeks later, his agenda was much less ambiguous than that of Webb. He asked the general to “consider helping us alter this design to one that can be reasonably seen to ‘honor and recognize’ all Vietnam veterans,” and “to resign from the Board of Sponsors.” Carhart argued that Maya Lin’s memorial was “not

⁶⁶ The use of this phrase originated with Tom Carhart. He noted his disdain for the memorial’s design by writing, “By this will we be remembered: a black gash of shame and sorrow, hacked into the national visage that is the Mall.” Tom Carhart, “Insulting Vietnam Vets,” *New York Times*, October 24, 1981.

⁶⁷ “Letter from James Webb to William Westmoreland, November 26, 1981,” File: Personal Papers, Topical, Veteran Activities, Memorials, 1967-1981, Box 36: Personal Papers, Topical Veterans Activities, Memorial, *William C. Westmoreland Papers*, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina. For more information on this subject see the chapter “Using the Pen to Strengthen the Sword.”

only inappropriate, but also was directly insulting to the sacrifices made for the country by Vietnam veterans.” Like Webb, he suggested changes “of black to white, bringing the walls above ground, and installing an American flag.” However, Carhart indicated a much larger hope to pressure the general into withdrawing his support entirely.⁶⁸

They failed to sway Westmoreland’s opinion on the design.⁶⁹ No amount of cajoling by the opponents of the Wall’s design would keep him from fully supporting it. In response to Webb, Westmoreland firmly expressed his great displeasure with those against the design, barking, “The War in Vietnam sadly...divided our nation. Those of us who served in Vietnam believe that we fought for a worthy cause and are proud to have done so. It is now sad indeed to see efforts to divide us. Such efforts are unnecessary and...not justified by the facts.”⁷⁰

In reality, some elements of the design were unsavory to Westmoreland as well, and he even met with Scruggs in late 1981 to review them and to discuss the concerns.⁷¹

⁶⁸ “Letter from Thomas Carhart to William Westmoreland, December 8, 1981,” File: Personal Papers, General, May-July 1981, Box 16: Westmoreland Papers, *William C. Westmoreland Papers*, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina. Enclosed with the letter is a copy of a letter signed by both Democratic and Republican Congressman asking Secretary of the Interior James Watt to oversee a review of the memorial design. He also sent along clippings discussing support.

⁶⁹ “Letter from William Westmsworeland to Col. Stockman, June 15, 1981,” File: Personal Papers, General, May-July 1981, Box 16: Westmoreland Papers, *William C. Westmoreland Papers*, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina.

⁷⁰ “Letter from William Westmoreland to James Webb, December 28, 1981,” File: Personal Papers, General, May-July 1981, Box 16: Westmoreland Papers, *William C. Westmoreland Papers*, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina.

⁷¹ In a letter from Westmoreland to Robert Snell, he stated “I was not pleased with the inscription and have recommended strongly to the President of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund...that the words ‘for a noble cause’ be inserted in the ‘Prologue.’ I personally would be satisfied with the design with those added words. However, if veterans as whole are not satisfied, and I doubt that anyone knows whether they are or not, I would urge that construction be held in abeyance and an alternate design considered. I plan to discuss this matter with Jan Scruggs.” “Letter William Westmoreland to from Robert Snell, November 8, 1981,” File: Personal Papers, Topical, Veteran Activities, Memorials, 1967-1981, Box 36: Personal Papers,

However, after this meeting, he saw no reason for those elements to make or break the building of the monument. Of the few things he sought for alterations, he believed none should hinder the project. The inscription, already set to be modified “to reflect honor, courage, and devotion to country,” and the placement of an American flag, which he deemed highly necessary, would not interfere with commencement of the memorial’s construction, in his estimation.⁷²

On a whole, Westmoreland believed Maya Lin’s design would not dredge up the divisiveness of the war or send some sort of liberal political message about it. He felt the monument would be elegant, tasteful, and fit in quite well on the National Mall. As he wrote to James Webb, “it is in no way a “trench”, black polished granite is far more handsome than any other possible stone, the chronological listing of names is not inappropriate, the structure reflects dignity and good taste and blends in aesthetically well with the environment of that beautiful area of the mall.”⁷³ Although he made sure that Webb knew he took his concerns quite seriously, in the end, Westmoreland told him “my verdict is not in agreement with yours.” To the general the most important issue was a completed memorial, unveiled to the country, and working to change public perceptions.

The similarity between Scruggs and Westmoreland’s desire to keep politics out of Americans’ psyches when it came to the Wall, stemmed from the fact that they both

Topical Veterans Activities, Memorial, *William C. Westmoreland Papers*, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina.

⁷² “Letter from William Westmoreland to James Webb, December 28, 1981.”

⁷³ Ibid.

wanted reverence for the men who served.⁷⁴ Westmoreland staunchly stood by Scruggs and the VVMF, the project, and the design and never flinched under the pressure put on by conservative veterans and politicians. He knew conflict would not only destroy the Wall, but it would also kill any chance he had of changing the public's opinion on the military and its veterans. Honoring, and therefore, salvaging the reputation of the men who served in Vietnam would, in turn, save the military tradition of the United States.

After rejecting conservative calls for change, Westmoreland continued his support of the VVMF. He was quite pleased when Scruggs wrote him in March of 1982 with one of his many update letters, bringing news of a settlement.⁷⁵ A bit off schedule now, Scruggs wrote, the issues that threatened to halt the memorial in its tracks had dissipated. The VVMF would move forward and install a flag at the site and a statue connected to the monument, a human representation of those who served. At the bottom of this official letter from the VVMF's president, was a handwritten note meant for delivery to Scruggs: "Congratulations on your success in solving the design controversy. I admire the way you handled such a sensitive and important problem."⁷⁶

Within two weeks, Westmoreland had a letter on his desk, requesting his attendance and participation in the official groundbreaking ceremony for what would

⁷⁴ Scruggs' discusses that he wanted an apolitical, non-controversial memorial that honored Vietnam veterans and their service in Scruggs and Swerdlow, *To Heal a Nation*, 12-13.

⁷⁵ A detailed discussion of the settlement is found in Schulzinger, *A Time for Peace*, 95-101. Jan Scruggs' account of the compromise can be found in in Scruggs and Swerdlow, *To Heal A Nation*, 93-107.

⁷⁶ "Letter from Jan Scruggs to William Westmoreland March 3, 1982," File: Personal Papers, Topical, Veterans Activities, Memorials, 1981-1983, Box 36: Personal Papers, Topical Veterans Activities, Memorial, *William C. Westmoreland Papers*, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina Always keeping him apprised and he says they had a meeting with "detractors" of the Wall that ended with "an agreement for the VVMF to pursue the approval of a flag and a statue of a U.S. serviceman to be included in the design."

become the Vietnam Veterans Memorial.⁷⁷ Scruggs hoped he would attend, particularly because he believed that for the monument to be accepted “we need a prominent general at the podium that day.”⁷⁸

Westmoreland obliged, attending the dedication of the Memorial, a celebration he believed “should have a positive impact.”⁷⁹ He also led the parade of veterans who marched on the nation’s capital. According to Scruggs, the general “loved the Salute. Enjoyed the camaraderie, etc....he likes the Entrance Plaza.”⁸⁰ In fact, numerous veterans contacted Westmoreland in the year after the dedication, telling him how they liked the monument. According to him, he received fifty letters from veterans everyday stating how much they “like the memorial,” even though many initially “thought that they would not like it.”⁸¹

⁷⁷ “Letter from Jan Scruggs to William Westmoreland, March 17, 1982,” File: Personal Papers, Topical, Veterans Activities, Memorials, 1981-1983, Box 36: Personal Papers, Topical Veterans Activities, Memorial, *William C. Westmoreland Papers*, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina from The Wall file.

⁷⁸ “Letter from Jan Scruggs to William Westmoreland, December 21, 1981,” File: National Sponsoring Committee, Westmoreland, William C. 1980-1984, Box 27: Office Files: 1979-1985, *Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund Records, 1965-1994*, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

⁷⁹ “Letter from William Westmoreland to Jan Scruggs, August, 17, 1982,” File: National Sponsoring Committee, Westmoreland, William C. 1980-1984, Box 27: Office Files: 1979-1985, *Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund Records, 1965-1994*, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

⁸⁰ “VVMF Call Report, December 3, 1982,” File: National Sponsoring Committee, Westmoreland, William C. 1980-1984, Box 27: Office Files: 1979-1985, *Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund Records, 1965-1994*, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

⁸¹ “VVMF Call Report, June, 16, 1983,” File: National Sponsoring Committee, Westmoreland, William C. 1980-1984, Box 27: Office Files: 1979-1985, *Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund Records, 1965-1994*, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

After Westmoreland's desire for a national memorial came to fruition, he shifted his attention to other related projects. His next contribution to Americans' perceptions of Vietnam veterans came via the promotion of the Vietnam Veterans Leadership Program (VVLP), a flagship of the Reagan administration, to help those who had returned from the war reintegrate into society.⁸²

In fact, the initiative mainly served as a means to re-shape the image of veterans and offered little substantial help or leadership training. This outcome corresponded with Westmoreland's objectives. He promoted it as "an effort designed to affirm pride and integrity in military service, while demonstrating that Vietnam Veterans are a leadership resource not to be pitied or treated as guilt-ridden victims." The program might have had the dual effect of making "a lasting impact on the American society as well as on the individual lives of those who served their country with such distinction in Vietnam," but clearly, Westmoreland was most interested in what the public thought about the veterans, rather than its ability to help those who served.⁸³

The general often spoke to associations and groups regarding the promise of the VVLP, focusing on proving the men who served were valiant and represented the best America had to offer. The man who served in Vietnam, according to Westmoreland, was

⁸² For a more in-depth discussion of the Vietnam Veterans Leadership program see the chapters "Using the Pen to Strengthen the Sword" and "Salvaging the American Martial Tradition" in this dissertation.

⁸³ "Letter from William Westmoreland to General John W. Vessey, Jr., July 18, 1983," File: Personal Papers, Topical, Vet. Activities, Viet. Vet. Leadership Prog. (Apr-Aug 1983), Box 37: Personal Papers, Veterans Activities, *William C. Westmoreland Papers*, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina.

not “a drug ridden psychotic outlaw,” but “a man of pride and initiative.”⁸⁴ Even if some might need assistance with reintegration, he contended it had little to do with their service and everything to do with labels attached by the American public, leaders, and institutions. In fact, Westmoreland would counter, a recent poll concluded that nearly all were happy they served, more than half would do so again, and almost three-fourths liked their experience in the American military.⁸⁵

To him, those who served in Vietnam were “a precious national asset” that was “as good a force as we have ever put on any battlefield.”⁸⁶ He adamantly opposed their being “ashamed” of themselves because they performed their orders, emphasizing that the defeat was not their fault.⁸⁷ In fact, he acknowledged his own reintegration problems, what journalist Jack Norman called “Vietnam-veteran syndrome.” According to Westmoreland, however, the maturity that came with his age, his previous experience in war, and his lack of confusion over the justness of the war saved him from becoming stuck in that phase.⁸⁸

⁸⁴ William Westmoreland as quoted in “Westmoreland calls vet portrayal unfair,” *The Pentagon News*, (Where), 1983, File: Clippings, Topical, Veterans Activities (1980-1983), Box 67, *William C. Westmoreland Papers*, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina. Myra MacPherson discusses the druggie image of Vietnam veterans and actual drug abuse among them in *Long Time Passing: Vietnam and the Haunted Generation* (Bloomington: Indiana State Press, 1984), 572-575

⁸⁵ Ibid. Westmoreland quotes the information from this 1980 Harris Poll in the article.

⁸⁶ Peter Bragdon, “Ex-military chief calls veterans ‘precious national resource’,” *The Oregonian*, 1982, File: Clippings, Topical, Veterans Activities (1980-1983), Box 67, *William C. Westmoreland Papers*, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina.

⁸⁷ Peter Schaffer, “Westmoreland: No shame to have served in Vietnam,” no date, File: Clippings, Topical, Education, 1980s, Box 65 File: *William C. Westmoreland Papers*, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina.

⁸⁸ Jack Norman, “Westmoreland’s crusade goes on,” *The Milwaukee Journal*, Sunday, September 9, 1984, File: Clippings, Topical, Veterans Activities, (1984-1986), Box 67, *William C. Westmoreland Papers*, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina.

Throughout the 1980s, Westmoreland continued his work to change American perspectives on the war, its participants, and the American military, particularly “trying to give a boost to Vietnam veterans.” But even a decade after Saigon fell, he acknowledged there was significantly “more ground to break.”⁸⁹ His prescription was to participate in parades throughout the country to celebrate the Vietnam veteran as a belated thank you and welcome home.⁹⁰ The general believed these parades enhanced the way veterans felt about themselves, while presenting them in a new light to Americans. He acknowledged that parades like the highly attended one held in Washington, D.C. during the dedication weekend for the Vietnam Wall marked “a turning point in the attitude of the vet towards himself” and, in turn, positively affected Americans’ perspectives, one of the reasons why veterans’ groups and American cities chose to throw them. One reporter noted Westmoreland believed, “the period of mistreatment has ended for the Vietnam veteran.”⁹¹

A Veterans Day parade held in Atlanta in 1985 underscored how much things really had changed. As grand marshal of the parade, Westmoreland spoke to the crowd and, unlike the scene at numerous colleges across the country, any interruptions from the crowd came from cheers rather than boos and verbal protests. The veteran-friendly

⁸⁹ John Hogan, “Westmoreland: Public alters view of vets,” *The Idaho Statesman*, July 19, 1984, File: Clippings, Topical, Veterans Activities, (1984-1986), Box 67, *William C. Westmoreland Papers*, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina.

⁹⁰ Both Simon P. Newman, *Parades and the Politics of the Street: Festive Culture in the Early American Republic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999) and David Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes: The Making of American Nationalism, 1776-1820* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997) illustrate the national importance of public parades. They suggest that parades and the acting out of national identity helped to define and shape it in their minds.

⁹¹ Jack Norman, “Westmoreland’s crusade goes on.”

crowd, according to *The Atlanta Constitution*, celebrated as the veterans passed. The only placards seen were those in support of veterans' causes and in contempt of anti-war protestors." They also gave Westmoreland "a hero's welcome." At a luncheon later in the day, he praised the men who served in Vietnam who did not lose the war because they "won a strategic victory by holding the line for 10 years."⁹² But his message centered on the veneration of the veteran. Declared the general, "the Vietnam veteran is not the drug-crazed, psychotic, reluctant warrior as he has been wrongly portrayed," in fact, he "is a valuable national asset who is assuming a position of leadership in our society."⁹³

In 1986, Westmoreland continued to speak at college campuses, visiting twelve in that year and twelve more in the next.⁹⁴ He also continued to visit veterans around the country and to participate in parades. The first year anniversary of a small chapter of the Vietnam Veterans of America in Bucks County, Pennsylvania, was one of the many stops he made that year. Around fifty veterans gathered to hear their former commander speak about their valor, stating they were as good, and maybe even better, than the men who fought in America's previous wars. He told them how proud he was of them for answering the call of duty, rather than running away to college or Canada or protesting the war in the streets. At the end of his speech, after telling his men they had a right to feel proud of their actions in Vietnam, he quietly announced his participation in what

⁹² Westmoreland quoted in Scott Thurston and Monte Plott, "Westmoreland lauds Vietnam heroes in Atlanta's Veterans Day ceremonies," *The Atlanta Constitution*, November 12, 1985, File: Clippings, Topical, Veterans Activities, (1984-1986), Box 67, *William C. Westmoreland Papers*, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Paul Vitello, "The General Explains His War," *Newsday*, October 10, 1986, File: Clippings, Topical, Education, 1980s, Box 65 File: Clippings, Topical, Veterans Activities (1980-1983), Box 67, *William C. Westmoreland Papers*, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina.

would be his shining moment as the “commander” of his Vietnam veterans, the Chicago homecoming parade the next spring.⁹⁵

Once, when a journalist asked Westmoreland why he spent so much of his retirement speaking and appearing at veterans’ events, he explained “it is for the Vietnam veterans, who have been treated ‘terribly unfairly’ by their countrymen...to set the record straight on their behalf.” The writer had his reservations, believing that Westmoreland was most interested in his own image. Westmoreland’s impact was not lost on him, though. Although some at Stonybrook University, where the journalist was observing Westmoreland, “were mildly skeptical of the general’s version of history,” the majority, of all backgrounds, accepted him and listened to his message. From an ROTC member excited to see him to a boy with “hair to shoulders and crucifixes dangling from his earlobes” who spoke of the general’s “sincerity,” it was clear the stigma of Vietnam had lessened. In fact, during dinner at the student center, the young man characterized by his long hair and earrings commented he would serve under him gladly.⁹⁶

The end of the 1980s saw the forcefulness and frequency of Westmoreland’s campaign regarding the reshaping of the war, the image of its participants, and the American military tradition wane. Although it is possible his age slowed him to this point, it is likely, given his continued involvement in veterans’ ceremonies, that he believed he completed his job. He still criticized the media, especially Walter Cronkite,

⁹⁵Westmoreland indicates that 26 was the average age for those participating in World War II, while the average age of those serving in Vietnam was 19. Ken Carolan, “‘Atten-shut!’ Gen. Westmoreland Proud of His Viet Vets,” *Trentonian*, (Trenton, NJ), March 23, 1986, File: Clippings, Topical, Veterans Activities, (1984-1986), Box 67, *William C. Westmoreland Papers*, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina.

⁹⁶ Paul Vitello, “The General Explains His War.”

for “misleading” Americans.⁹⁷ He still worried about what he called the “Vietnam psychosis.”⁹⁸ He continued his attempts to shape what others thought and said about the conflict, a prime example of this being his participation in a letter-writing campaign to slander Oliver Stone’s *Platoon*.⁹⁹

However, he saw his journey as just about complete and believed by the late 1980s that “people see him differently these days. ‘Ten years ago, I was kind of just the bad guy with horns. I was a curiosity, he said. ‘I was really popular as a speaker because of curiosity. Now it’s all different...They think of me as a retired officer who performed to the utmost of his ability.’”¹⁰⁰ Even though this statement is a strong indication that his efforts had as much to do with his own image as those of his men, he also believed their

⁹⁷ Darrin Hostetler, “Former Vietnam commander criticizes U.S. media,” *State Press* (Arizona State University, Tempe, AZ), November 21, 1986, File: Clippings, Topical, Education, 1980s, Box 65 *William C. Westmoreland Papers*, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina. Westmoreland’s indictment of Cronkite regards the CBS journalist and anchorman’s February 27, 1968 commentary at the end of his newscast. The popular Cronkite expressed his concerns over continued escalation of the war stating, “we have been too often disappointed by the optimism of the American leaders, both in Vietnam and Washington, to have faith any longer in the silver linings they find in the darkest clouds.” A transcript of this commentary can be found in Bates, Milton J., Lawrence Lichty, Miles Paul, Ronald H. Spector, and Marilyn Young, *Reporting Vietnam: Part One: American Journalism* (New York: Library of America, 1998), 581-582.

⁹⁸ Paul Vitello, “The General Explains His War” Westmoreland also discusses the “psychosis” in a *Soldier of Fortune* interview: Tom Bates, “General William C. Westmoreland: Still in the Fight” *Soldier of Fortune*, March 1988, File: “Clippings, Topical, Interviews, 1980s,” Box 65, *William C. Westmoreland Papers*, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina.

⁹⁹ William Yarborough wrote he recently spoke with Westmoreland, and they were on the same page regarding the film. “The fact that this film purports to be a true account of U.S. troop experience in Vietnam adds to its virulence as a psychological weapon in connection both with those who wish to maximize its message and those who approach it innocently with open minds.” Yarborough said of the general, “He feels as I do, that the feasibility of some kind of a defensive psychological strategy should be looked into with special reference to this one film.”, “Letter from William Yarborough to General Richard G. Stilwell, June 11, 1987,” File: “Personal Papers, Topical, Veterans Activities, June-Dec 1987,” Box 34: *William C. Westmoreland Papers*, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina.

¹⁰⁰ Bruce Smith, “Westmoreland still waging Vietnam campaigns,” *The State*, (Columbia, S.C.), Sunday, October 12, 1986, File: “Clippings, Topical, Veterans Activities (1984-1986),” Box 67 *William C. Westmoreland Papers*, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina.

images changed immensely, since the end of the war, in part due to his influence. In an interview conducted with *Soldier of Fortune* in 1988, Westmoreland got to the heart of why he campaigned so hard to save the image of the men who served in Vietnam. He declared, “When I retired I had the choice of going back to ‘the farm’ and lowering my golf handicap, or devoting my energies to more constructive things. I felt terrible about the way Vietnam veterans were being treated and I decided that was going to be the number-one priority of mine—to do what I could to support that Vietnam veteran and try to explain to the American public that it was not he who lost the war.”¹⁰¹

William Westmoreland’s attempt to tell the story of the Vietnam soldier went well beyond the hope of changing the image of the Vietnam veteran, as that was simply a means to a very particular end. His condemnation of the media for negative perceptions of the war, his challenges to the historical narrative, his praise of the men who served as best they could were for a much greater cause than the redemption of his men.

He felt the need to alter Americans’ perceptions of the performance of the American military in Vietnam, opinions that significantly altered the institutions’ once untarnished image, undermined the valor of its members, and threatened the American military tradition, and possibly, the military itself. His loyalty to this cause went beyond simply informing the public about the war and its events from the standpoint of someone who served. His public activities heavily focused on reshaping the public’s beliefs about the war in order to save the institution and the tradition to which he committed his life and to which, he believed, the United States owed much of its exceptional success.

¹⁰¹ Tom Bates, “General William C. Westmoreland: Still in the Fight”

CHAPTER 4

USING THE PEN TO STRENGTHEN THE SWORD: JAMES WEBB'S FIGHT TO SAVE MARTIAL MANHOOD IN THE WAKE OF THE VIETNAM WAR

"Man's noblest moment is the one spent on the fields of fire."

James Henry Webb, Jr., 1978¹

On June 3, 1990, fifteen years after the fall of Saigon, James Henry Webb, Jr. stood at the Confederate Memorial at Arlington National Cemetery admitting to his audience that this "is by no means my first visit to this spot."² The monument, dedicated in 1914 by President Woodrow Wilson, honors those who died fighting for the Confederate States of America in a war that split the United States in two. A veteran of a modern war that figuratively did the same, Webb, who regarded himself as an honorary son of the South, declared he often came to the site after his return from the Vietnam War to contemplate his relationship to one of its inscriptions.³ Attributed to a Confederate chaplain, it reads, "*Not for fame or reward, not for place or for rank, not lured by*

¹ James Webb, *Fields of Fire* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J: Prentice Hall, 1978), 22.

² James Webb, "Remarks at the Confederate Memorial," Arlington National Cemetery, Arlington, Virginia; June 3, 1990, <http://jameswebb.com/speeches/speeches-confedmem.htm>.

³ Webb often connects his personality and life experiences to his Scots-Irish ancestral background. Scholars often refer to the Scots-Irish as the "other Irish." The multi-generational story of their lives in the United States indicates their influence on Southern American culture, especially. Their typical characteristics include determination and tenacity, with a strong streak of patriotism. They also strongly support the military, with many joining in some form of military service. Good scholarship on the people, their culture, and their influence on the United States include Henry Jones Ford, *The Scotch-Irish in America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1915), forgottenbooks.org; James G. Leyburn, *The Scotch-Irish: A Social History* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1962); Karen F. McCarthy, *The Other Irish: The Scots-Irish Rascals Who Made America*, (New York: Sterling Publishing, 2011). Webb also wrote his own book on the topic, *Born Fighting: How the Scots-Irish Shaped America* (New York: Broadway Books, A Division of Random House, 2005).

ambition or goaded by necessity, but in simple obedience to duty as they understood it, these men suffered all, sacrificed all, dared all, and died.”

Webb felt he understood the plight of his numerous ancestors who served in the Civil War. They were men who, in his words, struggled with the same “misperceptions that seemed rampant about the people with whom I had served and what, exactly we had attempted to accomplish.” The soldiers of the Confederacy “whose enormous suffering and collective gallantry are to this day still misunderstood by most Americans” had much in common with him and his comrades, he said. Although hyperbole, Webb’s remarks reveal his personal belief, shaped by his experiences as a Vietnam veteran, that all soldiers who fought for their country’s ideals had performed their duty as martial men. The inscription, in his mind, could describe “all soldiers in all wars...who desire more than anything to sleep with the satisfaction that...they had fulfilled their duty -- as they understood it.”⁴

Although he already had a significant understanding of duty to country by the time he arrived in Vietnam, the period he spent “in country” during the conflict in Southeast Asia augmented his belief in it. The American public’s dismissal of his valorous participation in that tradition defined the course of his life.⁵ In the rocky first

⁴ James Webb, “Remarks at the Confederate Memorial.”

⁵ The stories of physical confrontation, particularly spitting, between Americans and unwitting Vietnam veterans documented in Bob Greene, *Homecoming: When the Soldiers Returned from Vietnam* (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1989) conflict with the scholarly work Jerry Lembcke. The sociologist argues in his book *The Spitting Image: Myth, Memory, and the Legacy of Vietnam* (New York: New York University Press, 1998) that such incidents are unfounded and that those against the war saw the returning veterans as allies. However, both arguments highlight a myth that obscures the totality of the public’s (especially Republican Americans) actual reception of veterans. Both liberal and conservative veterans (for example Ron Kovic, *Born on the Fourth of July* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1976) present compelling

years after his return to the United States, the treatment he encountered personally and often observed toward his former comrades shocked and angered him, pushing him to vocally campaign against it. Through much of the 1970s and 1980s, Webb worked to gain for his Vietnam comrades the respect he believed they all deserved, the same respect so easily afforded to all of the American soldiers who came before them.

The loss of esteem felt by the veterans of the conflict, more often than not, came from traditional understandings of martial masculinity in the United States that defined manhood as linked to men's successful performance in war. These beliefs combined with the country's long history of martial victories to turn many within the American public against those who fought in Southeast Asia. Most importantly, the loss of the war threatened this time-honored ideal of martial manhood, which drove men to fight for their country, and therefore, threatened the strength of the American military, the nation, and notions of American exceptionalism. For Webb, his personal background, participation in the military, and political beliefs made him place great stock in what these long-standing American myths signified.

The former Marine chose to use his literary prowess and his position within political circles in the nation's capital to help reconfigure martial manhood and the martial tradition. He campaigned for the better part of a decade to diminish the belief that veterans of the Vietnam War did not fit into the mold of the martial man. His contention,

versions of their invisibility to the public. It is this scholar's contention that this invisibility or, at best, the general public's (war supporters or those apathetic to the situation) scorn of its veterans, derives from Americans' entrenchment in the importance of American military tradition and its connection to American exceptionalism. Sources regarding Webb's understanding of this issue presented throughout this chapter.

much like the sentiment he expressed at the Confederate Memorial, was that fighting in an unpopular war that the country eventually lost should not preclude veterans from having a place among the noble and masculine ranks of the men who established and maintained American military tradition. If he could prove this thesis or, at least make others believe in it, he had the chance to save martial masculinity, the martial tradition, American exceptionalism.

The Origins of a Martial Man

Born in St. Joseph, Missouri in 1946, James Webb was a military brat who grew up on what journalist Robert Timberg termed “dusty, rundown military bases.”⁶ As his family followed his father, a World War II bomber pilot, from one Air Force base to another, Webb developed a “love of military life” that would lead him into the Marine Corps.⁷

Webb’s manhood developed, much like other young men, around observing his father and interacting with him. When on leave, according to his son, James, Sr. “was making up for the time we’d lost to his deployments, and he was teaching me his version of what it took to be a man.”⁸ That education included intense spankings and painful boxing lessons from a very young age that Webb now excuses as his father realizing “that

⁶ Robert Timberg, *The Nightingale Song* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995), 63.

⁷ “Webb Nominated for Assistant Secretary of Defense for Reserve Affairs,” *Voice of the Vietnam Veteran*, March, 1984; File: Memorial Design, Controversy and Criticism, Webb, James, 1980-1984; Box 32: Office Files: 1979-1985; *Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund Records, 1965-1994*; Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

⁸ James Webb, *I Heard My Country Calling* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2014), Loc 721.

as I grew older I would be measured by the timeless standard of whether or not I could meet the demands of manhood.”⁹

Webb’s masculine identity also formed around his Scots-Irish ethnicity. Webb defined himself as “a product of a culture that really took a couple of hundred years to get its feet on the ground,” an ethnicity that “did it by the rules, no special privileges.”¹⁰ His father’s career in the Air Force undoubtedly influenced his choice to become a martial man. However, his opinion of the culture of his Scots-Irish ancestors, including his immediate family, also informed this decision. The family’s first foray into combat in North America came during the Regulator War in the 1760s, according to Webb.¹¹ As he saw it, the Scots-Irish blood that ran through his veins was the life force behind not just his own desire to defend his country, but also the tradition of American militarism itself. In his book devoted to the importance of this ethnic group in the United States, he writes, “these are loyal Americans...They show up for our wars. Indeed, we cannot go to war without them. They haul our goods. They grow our food. They sweat in our factories. And if they turn against you, you are going to be in a fight.”¹²

In the mid-1980s, Webb suggested how all of the threads of his life tied together when he told journalist Brad Lemley he “fought” for everything he achieved in his life.

⁹ Ibid. Kindle Edition, Loc 729.

¹⁰ Brad Lemley, “Never Give an Inch: James Webb’s Struggle with Pen and Sword,” *Washington Post Magazine*, December 8, 1985. This article also presents the family of Webb’s mother (Vera Hodges Webb) as sharecroppers in Arkansas.

¹¹ James Webb, *Born Fighting: How the Scots-Irish Shaped America*, (New York: Broadway Books, 2005). Webb discusses the warrior nature of his family and the Scots-Irish in general from 154-173.

¹² Ibid., 19.

To him, a hardscrabble and upstanding background coupled with his time in the military created a man with “duty, integrity, principles, loyalty.” Webb declared to the reporter, “those are the words that form the framework in which I operate.”¹³

His time in the military only served to increase this sentiment, and tapped into his desire to prove himself a martial man in the tradition of his ancestors. Although he possessed reasonable intellect, he was unable to attend college straight out of high school due to money woes, a working class issue that had haunted the Webb men for decades and left them uneducated.¹⁴ What saved Webb from a similar fate was a Navy ROTC scholarship that sent him to the University of Southern California, with a nomination to the U.S. Naval Academy coming soon after.¹⁵ By the time he graduated in 1968 at the age of 22, he had more than proven himself, with a Superintendent’s Letter of Commendation for outstanding leadership. Shortly after that, he graduated from basic infantry training with the United States Marines at the head of a 250-person class.¹⁶

The young Marine’s drive for martial excellence accelerated during the Vietnam War, especially given the reputation he gained in the academy. When sent “in country” in March of 1969 as part of the Fifth Marines, within one day commanders put him in the infamous First Battalion’s Delta Company in the Arizona Valley because they

¹³ Brad Lemley, “Never Give an Inch: James Webb’s Struggle with Pen and Sword.”

¹⁴ Pete Earley, “Pentagon Nominee Gives Views on Women: Novelist Webb is Opposed To Combat Roles for Them,” *The Washington Post*, April 26, 1984. Webb’s father was the first of his family to receive any real amount of state sanctioned education going to night school for 26 years.

¹⁵ Robert Timberg, *The Nightingale Song*, 64-65.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 64-65.

desperately needed help.¹⁷ Eventually the Marine Corps made him commander of the company; then, “a year ahead of his peers,” the Marines promoted him to Captain.¹⁸

In many ways, Webb’s time in Vietnam signified the best martial manhood had to offer, and the Marines not only promoted him for it, but also decorated him accordingly. As the previous commander of his company joked, he was always writing up an award for Webb because his men were always nominating him.¹⁹ He received two Bronze Stars with the “V” (valor) device, as well as the Silver Star for heroism in combat, but it was his decision to throw himself between a comrade and a grenade that earned him the distinguished Navy Cross, as well as a Purple Heart.²⁰

Although those wounds eventually ended his military service, as later infections related to his injuries led to his premature retirement in 1972, health concerns did not slow down Webb nor deter him from his quest for masculine excellence in his civilian life.²¹ In 1975, he graduated from Georgetown University with a law degree and quickly entered into life as a public servant who worked for years as an advocate for veterans and members of the military. Although his political affiliation had always been with the

¹⁷ Ibid., 153.

¹⁸ Ken Biffle, “Jim Webb, author—and more,” *Dallas Morning News*, October 23, 1983. A strong history of the U.S. Marines that illustrates how Webb’s characteristics fit into the institution is Aaron B. O’Connell, *Underdogs: The Making of the Modern Marine Corps* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2012). Moreover, O’Connell’s discussion of what he calls “Marine exceptionalism” (pages 5-6), indicates how Webb’s belief in his Scots-Irish background and his time entrenched in Marine culture helped to inflate his understanding of his own importance.

¹⁹ Robert Timberg, *The Nightingale Song*, 158.

²⁰ “Webb Nominated for Assistant Secretary of Defense for Reserve Affairs,” contains information regarding his Bronze and Silver Star. Robert Timberg, *The Nightingale Song*, 161 contains information regarding his Navy Cross/Purple Heart.

²¹ Kent Biffle, “Jim Webb, author—and more.”

Democratic Party, Webb switched during the 1976 presidential campaign, recalling later “Jimmy Carter made me a Republican.”²²

In the late 1970s Paul Hammerschmidt (R-AK) hired him as the assistant minority counsel and then chief minority counsel for the House of Representatives’ Veterans Affairs Committee. He rapidly gained a reputation as the “key Republican staff member in the congress for all issues regarding veterans, including employment, Agent Orange, posttraumatic stress disorders, studies on former prisoners of war, and the workings of the VA hospital system.”²³

Webb soon realized that his successes and influence could have an impact on how veterans viewed their service, and how Americans perceived the symbolic image of martial manhood. Working toward this goal became a constant of his professional efforts from that moment forward. What better person to bolster martial masculinity, he thought, than a man who was born into the traditions of martial manhood, who lived and breathed it throughout his adult life, and who *Dallas Morning News* reporter Kent Biffle described in this way in 1983: “My ego is deep in an inky corner of some forgotten basement. My rattled macho is down there too. I just met James Webb.”²⁴

²² As quoted in Brad Lemley, “Never Give an Inch: James Webb’s Struggle with Pen and Sword.”

²³ Kent Biffle, “Jim Webb, author—and more.”

²⁴ Ibid.

A New Martial Man: Recapturing the Image of the Vietnam Veteran

Maintaining one's masculine image in the wake of service in Vietnam became a difficult endeavor for veterans, given many Americans' perceptions of them. Webb, due to his own heightened sense of machismo and his dedication to the armed forces, lamented this problem and struggled with the thought that Americans did not place him or his brothers-in-arms within the country's martial tradition. In his estimation, the "quintessentially male" role in life was "[t]aking up arms and defending the society," and, since Vietnam veterans performed this duty, regardless of America's loss of the war, they deserved the same recognition as any other man who served his country.²⁵

Since Americans saw placement within the martial tradition as linked to martial success, they left Vietnam veterans out of its history. Webb felt he needed to do something to change this widely-held system of beliefs. He anticipated the initial key to this alteration was for veterans of the war to shape their own image in the eyes of the American public.

In a 1976 speech accepting the Vietnam Veterans Civic Council's Outstanding Veteran Award, he argued that he and his comrades were invisible to the American public, a sentiment that surfaced when he read a newspaper article discussing how the Vietnam War altered America. The writer of the piece consulted over fifty Americans,

²⁵ "A.D. Horne Tape, May 12, 1980," Interview Transcript for *Washington Post* Book, *The Wounded Generation: America After Vietnam*, participants: Phillip Caputo, James Fallows, Richard Harwood, Bobby Mueller, Dean Phillips, Lucian K. Truscott IV, James Webb, and John P. Wheeler, page 24; File: Office Files, Public Relations, *The Wounded Generation*, Transcript, *Washington Post*, Meeting, May 12, 1980; Box 55: Office Files, 1979-1985; *Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund Records, 1965-1994*; Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

but not one Vietnam soldier, according to Webb. At that point, he began to recognize that Americans saw Vietnam veterans as an “irrelevant” part of their own image shaping.²⁶ He believed the public relegated them to this place of insignificance because of their lack of success in meeting the supposed objectives of the war, but Webb arrived at a more complex understanding of it too, suggesting that others stole their ability to speak for themselves.

In the turmoil of the 1960s, he believed war protestors took control over how Americans viewed those who participated in the war, and how the country would receive them when they arrived home.²⁷ Since the war was over, it was time for men such as himself, someone who had subverted the negative aspects of that image with his wartime heroics, his military rank, and his no-nonsense personality, to take back control of their image and reconfigure their lives and experiences into a more masculine portrait.

The presentation of awards to Vietnam veterans, like the one the council bestowed on him, he stressed had the ability to give “notice to the community” to readjust their perceptions of the men who served.²⁸ But, understandably, it would take much more than prizes to alter Americans’ beliefs. Webb knew this, and to achieve such an objective, he considered it essential for Americans to understand that serving in Vietnam “required sublimation of self to what, at least then, was perceived to be in the public good,” an action that connoted duty, honor, and masculinity. An acknowledgement of his

²⁶ James Webb, “The Invisible Vietnam Veteran,” *The Washington Post*, August 4, 1976.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

thoughts among the American public, he hoped, might lead to a marked change in how the public treated them and garner them the “dignity and respect” he knew they had been worthy of all along.²⁹

Webb chose the written word as his first major contribution to the modification of the Vietnam veterans’ image and the definition of martial manhood.³⁰ The decision came after a tough first year at Georgetown University in the early 1970s, during which he encountered numerous painful instances of discrimination due to his status as a Vietnam veteran.³¹ A short story written by Ernest Hemingway about a U.S. Marine whose long delayed return home from World War I meant he missed the array of the welcome home events held for its veterans, initially moved Webb to put his own experiences on paper.³²

It was during this time that he came to realize, as he mentions in a 2014 biography, “the value of fighting not with my hands or with weapons but with my brain.”³³ In a fit of anger during a constitutional law class discussion deriding Vietnam

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ By no means was Webb the first or the only Vietnam veteran to write either non-fiction or fiction autobiographical accounts experiences in Vietnam. Seminal works from veterans include Philip Caputo, *A Rumor of War* (New York: Holt, Reinhardt, and Winston, 1977); Larry Heinemann, *Close Quarters* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1977); Ron Kovic, *Born on the Fourth of July*, (New York: Pocket Books, 1977); Tim O’Brien, *If I Die in a Combat Zone, Box Me Up and Ship Me Home* (New York: Delacorte, 1973), and *Going After Cacciato* (New York: Doubleday, 1978); and *The Things They Carried* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1990).

³¹ Former Marine Lewis B. Puller, Jr. described similar treatment in the academic environment. See *Fortunate Son: The Healing of a Vietnam Vet* (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1991), 258-260.

³² Robert Timberg, *The Nightingale’s Song*, 222. The Ernest Hemingway short story referred to is “Soldier’s Home” from the short story collection *In Our Time* (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1925). Webb discusses how after he returned to the States his reconnected with his love of reading “devouring” historical, philosophical, and political works, as well as how he began honing his writing skills in Webb, *I Heard My Country Calling*, Kindle Edition, Loc 4595.

³³ Webb, *I Heard My Country Calling*, Kindle Edition, Loc 4880.

veterans' roles in the war, Webb tuned out his classmates and his professor and started writing what would become his first novel, *Fields of Fire*. As journalist Robert Timberg claims, "with no advance, no publisher, and little more than anger, pride, and ego to sustain him," Webb began the arduous journey to write "the war as he knew it."³⁴ Five years after he began the process and numerous rejections from major publishers later, *Fields of Fire* made it to the bookstores in the fall of 1978.³⁵

The novel, which Webb called his own "personal catharsis," tells the story of three soldiers from disparate American backgrounds whose wartime experiences in Southeast Asia helped them create a type of martial brotherhood that closely resembled that of other wars.³⁶ Although, at times, a conventional war tale that highlights the violence of the firefights undertaken by the soldiers, *Fields of Fire* also contains elements of extreme machismo missing from other Vietnam War novels of the 1970s.³⁷ Supposedly, "Webb despised the post-modern, experimental novel favored by such war critics as Tim O'Brien and Larry Heinemann," which pushed him to highlight the theme of martial masculinity in the novel.³⁸

³⁴ Timberg, *The Nightingale's Song*, 223.

³⁵ Ibid., 224-226.

³⁶ Brad Lemley, "Never Give an Inch: James Webb's Struggle with Pen and Sword."

³⁷ Strong literary examples of war stories before the age of Vietnam include Stephen Crane, *The Red Badge of Courage* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1895); Erich Maria Remarque *All Quiet in the Western Front* (New York: Little, Brown, and Company, 1929); and James Jones, *The Thin Red Line* (New York: Scribner, 1962).

³⁸ Robert Timberg, *The Nightingale Song*, 148. O'Brien's *Going After Cacciato* and *The Things They Carried*, as well as Heinemann's *Close Quarters*, focus on philosophical issues and tend to examine issues of morality, mortality, and ethics.

Early in the book, for example, the main character Hodges reflects Webb's distinct belief in the performance of military responsibilities as the rightful inroad to the respect typically afforded to the successful martial man. He shrugs off any attention to the details of the cause, since "it was the fight not the cause that mattered," claiming a common feeling of completed duty among the men who pass down the tradition from generation to generation, regardless of the specifics of the conflict.³⁹

Webb also wanted to prove that the war's participants deserved a place in it. At one point in novel, Hodges explains why he belongs in that history even though he came from a generation of men who seemed not to understand duty.⁴⁰ In language reminiscent of Webb's beliefs regarding his Scots-Irish background, Hodges cries at a picture of the father he lost in World War II: ". . . my war is not as simple as yours was, Father. People seem to question their obligation to serve on other than their terms. But enough of that. I fight because we have always fought. It doesn't matter who."⁴¹

In the novel, Webb describes this masculine tradition of duty to country as a belief as old as the Civil War, but the war of Hodges's father, World War II, is his main example for connections between the soldiers of Vietnam and America's martial men.⁴² This wedding of the oft-condemned Vietnam soldier to the overtly heroic and honorable

³⁹ Webb, *Fields of Fire*, 29.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 22.

⁴¹ Ibid., 22.

⁴² Ibid., 27. The main character, Hodges, carries with him family stories featuring General Robert E. Lee "a man of honor" who deeply felt the loss of "God's bravest creatures" on the battlefield, a loss that in one story included three of Hodges' ancestors.

Second World War participant is a consistent theme throughout the book. At one point in the story, a friendly conversation between a Vietnam veteran and a World War II veteran suggests their common link to martial manhood as fighting on the battlefield, an experience that allowed them to relate to one another, and bond over “how scared they were and how many people they had seen killed.” Webb suggests through the thoughts of the Vietnam soldier Gilliland that it was “as if each had touched the devil and could talk about it because the other person had also touched him.”⁴³

The long-held tradition of martial brotherhood, both among those battling together on the “fields of fire” and among all who spent time on them, is the main tool utilized by Webb to portray his comrades as men who took their responsibility to country, their countrymen, and their comrades to heart. Hodges describes this brotherhood as one that developed on the battlefield, a bond with “a purity...that could not be matched anywhere else.”⁴⁴

The battlefield itself, the bush, also becomes a part of this demonstration because, Webb argues, it was where boys learned how to be men. As one character relates, “it was all here...[a]ll of life’s compelling throbs condensed and honed each time a bullet flew: the pain, the bother-love, the sacrifice. Nobility discovered by those who’d never even contemplated sacrifice, never felt an emotion worth their own blood on someone else’s altar...none back there, back in the bowels of the World.”⁴⁵ For the men of Webb’s war,

⁴³ Ibid., 187.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 245.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 276.

as well as those before them, the battlefield was where they learned the real meaning of nobility, manhood, and brotherhood, regardless of the outcome.

The main hero of Webb's book, Hodges, whose background closely resembles that of Webb, gives his life for the cause on this all-important battlefield. As Hodges' Japanese wife explains the news to their son, she embarks on a monologue that honors his masculine role not only as a warrior, but as an American man. She tells her son, "...he was a warrior there [in Vietnam]. These men—these Americans you see. They are warriors. They fight in many places."⁴⁶ His son replies, "Is it good to be so brave? To fight for your country like that? Was it a *good* thing that my father did?"⁴⁷ When his mother explains that it was, the boy proclaims "Then I too will be a warrior."⁴⁸

By suggesting that a Vietnam soldier symbolically passed the role of warrior down to the next generation, just like his counterparts of previous wars, Webb indicated to his readers the tradition of martial masculinity had not been tarnished by the war or its loss, and it would continue to be passed down to future generations of martial American men. His participation on the "fields of fire" was the only rite of passage needed to attain this warrior status, what Webb once called "the most respected tradition in the military." Final victory was unnecessary.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Ibid., 320. Webb's choice of a Japanese wife connects with his fixation on Japanese warrior culture. A discussion of this topic occurs later in this chapter.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 320.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 321.

⁴⁹ "Tradition and the Military, an Interview with James Webb," *American Enterprise*, March/April 1997, <http://www.jameswebb.com/articles/americanenterprise-miltradition.html>.

Fields of Fire would only reach a moderate level of popularity, and because of that, one could consider its impact on Americans' perceptions of Vietnam veterans and martial masculinity, as quite modest.⁵⁰ However, the former Marine achieved his personal goal of putting his experiences and his opinions on paper for the world to see. He would go on to write numerous other books, some also touching on the topic of the Vietnam War, but none would focus on schooling the American public on the masculine nature of the men who served their country in the same way as his first.⁵¹ The creation of this novel was just the beginning of James Webb's long-term campaign to recapture the image of the men he believed had a right to "a far better place in history than that now offered them by the so-called spokesmen of our so-called generation."⁵² They were the boys who became martial men, at least to him, in the bush of Vietnam.

The Successful Veteran: Establishing the Masculinity of the Warrior at Home

The act of writing *Fields of Fire* left Webb "ambivalent" about the war, even though he believed America's "attempt to help the Southvietnamese [sic] people was one

⁵⁰ Excerpts from major newspaper and periodical's highly favorable reviews of the book are available at <http://www.jameswebb.com/reviews/bookreviews-fields.htm>. One notable review not mentioned on Webb's website is Marc Leepson, "The Book: Powerful Saga of Survival in Vietnam," *Washington Post*, September 7, 1981.

⁵¹ Webb's *A Sense of Honor*, a *New York Times* Bestseller, which tells the story of a Navy first classman's journey to teach a young plebe the meaning of duty to country and his institution, comes closest to his desire to communicate martial manhood to his readers. His other works of fiction that involve the American military and Vietnam include *A Country Such as This*, (New York: Doubleday, 1981), *Something to Die For*, (New York: Morrow, 1991), and *Lost Soldiers*, (New York: Bantam, 2001).

⁵² "Heroes of the Vietnam Generation," *American Enterprise*, July/August 2000, <http://www.jameswebb.com/articles/americanenterprise-heroes.html>.

of the most moral acts we've attempted as a nation."⁵³ These mixed feelings indicated a continued disgust over the marginalization of his comrades in American society and among the military tradition, and since it had yet to be seen if the publication of *Fields of Fire* would have an impact on Americans perceptions, Webb decided not to rest on the possibility.

He remained haunted by his time at Georgetown living in the shadow of the predominately negative image of those who served in the war, even though he began to find considerable success as a lawyer. He continued to wonder how to prove to Americans that Vietnam soldiers were men cut from the same noble cloth of those who already were a part of the standard martial tradition. One of the ways he could do this was to debunk the idea that Vietnam veterans were the poster boys for failed reintegration, making them much different from their predecessors, and prove that they had the ability to reestablish themselves as stable and successful men after the war. Since his view of the possibilities for himself and his comrades ran counter to popular belief, he needed to find a way to sell their value to the American public.

He also worried that Vietnam veterans could be fooled by Americans' opinions of them, a problem that reinforced reintegration issues. He felt that when "a Vietnam veteran looks for success stories within his own age group," he finds only draft dodgers and protestors highlighted as positive representations of their generation. Such understandings of the Vietnam era, particularly in the press, left the veteran confused about his identity and alienated, according to Webb, and "[h]e cannot help but feel the

⁵³ Kent Biffle, "Jim Webb, author—and more." Webb said he came to this conclusion regarding the morality of the war after he did the research for his third book, *A Country Such as This* (1983).

knife twist every time he reads articles that elevate the ones who fled, collectively, to the level of prophets and moral purists” while he is condemned for using his own moral conscience to perform his duty to his country.⁵⁴

The media’s insinuation that these soldiers were immoral, rather than heroic, signified a lack of appreciation for their service and led to a significant sense of isolation and self-doubt, and therefore a lack of significant personal success. Although Webb often explained that he and his comrades were no different from Americans who served in other wars, he made a strong exception when it came to reintegration issues, since his own experiences taught him that those who returned from Vietnam encountered much different circumstances and, therefore, had much more to overcome than their predecessors.⁵⁵

Webb argued that “...all men who undergo combat feel alienated when they return to their society. The difference is that previously there has been a form of catharsis once you come back . . . a catharsis that was generated from your community to the individual.” Purging the effects of the war came to men of other wars much more easily because the American public treated them as heroes and thanked them profusely for their duty. Their service positively defined them.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ James Webb, “The Invisible Vietnam Veteran,” *The Washington Post*, August 4, 1976.

⁵⁵ Journalist Arnold R. Issacs expresses the same sentiment in his book *Vietnam Shadows: The War, Its Ghosts, and Its Legacy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 12. He argues the men of Vietnam were not different from those who fought in previous wars; it was the circumstances surrounding their return “to a country torn and full of doubt,” treated like “symbols of a great national failure.” Unlike the experience of earlier veterans, the American people did not express to them their gratitude or laud their heroism. The country and the government told them “nothing.”

⁵⁶ “A.D. Horne Tape, May 12, 1980,” 56.

Vietnam veterans, however, did not have a chance at such a catharsis, as Webb termed it, particularly because of the unpopularity of the war. However, he suggested Americans also “lost their curiosity about the experience,” given the extreme amount of media coverage during the war, and this lack of inquisitiveness caused them to ignore those who served even more so. Therefore, the returning veteran “was left to deal with it alone.” Webb lamented that they were at a great disadvantage when they arrived home, and it took its toll: “...you can feel it in their voice. There’s a true sense of isolation...It’s not just the sense of alienation or even the sense of rage, it’s having nothing, nowhere to vent it. No way to be brought back into the community on the terms of the experience.”⁵⁷

Because of these reintegration issues, Webb recognized that simply focusing on how Vietnam veterans’ time on the battlefield established them as dutiful martial men was not enough. If Americans were to accept them within the martial tradition, then the American public had to see them as capable of performing their masculine duties at home too. With that in mind, he began a campaign to destroy the stigma placed on Vietnam veterans and to illustrate their future worth to American society.

In the early 1980s, Webb explained why he thought Americans would accept his message. He suggested the societal trend toward traditional values and principles in the late 1970s and early 1980s could push Americans to the same understandings. The public had begun to search for role models “who have manifested a sense of country in any way

⁵⁷ Ibid., 59.

that that has been manifested.”⁵⁸ Since Vietnam veterans already completed that task, in his estimation, there now was room for an adjustment in how Americans viewed their leadership skills.

The only thing standing in his way, according to Webb, were liberals whom he believed had declared war on such aspects of traditional manhood. As evidence of such hostility, he cited feminist Betty Friedan who supposedly said “. . . machismo is dead. It died in Vietnam.”⁵⁹ He adamantly denied Vietnam was the reason for any faltering of American manhood stating, “. . . if it died at all in this society it died among the people who had to question who they are as male because through one way or another they avoided what is quintessentially male function in society and that’s going into uniform.”⁶⁰

He argued Vietnam actually proved that virility was very much alive in America because so many men, regardless of their personal desire to do so, performed the epitome of masculine behavior, warfare, out of masculine duty to country. If they proved their masculinity in wartime now, Americans should accept them as men and strong leaders at home.⁶¹

⁵⁸ Ibid., 67.

⁵⁹ Betty Freidan paraphrased by James Webb, “Horne Tape, May 12, 1980,” 23. For an accurate understanding of Freidan’s ideology and philosophy regarding gender and the United States, please see *The Feminism Mystique* (New York: Norton, 1963) and *The Second Stage* (New York: Summit Books, 1981). The chapter “Human Sex and Human Politics” (in *The Second Stage*) deals with the complexities of gender for American political understandings, as well as the country’s myths and symbols.

⁶⁰ “Horne Tape, May 12, 1980,” page 23.

⁶¹ Webb’s discussion of the liberal war on masculinity indicates a sentiment often connected to conservatives due to their belief in traditional gender roles. For a strong historical discussion of the changes in gender and sexuality in the United States during the 20th century please see Ruth Rosen *The*

In the Vietnam Veterans Leadership Program (VVLP), Webb found a partner in his campaign to prove Vietnam veterans' ability to function successfully as civilians. The program, a part of the Reagan administration's national volunteer agency, ACTION, enlisted men like Webb "who successfully made the transition back to civilian life" as mentors to their less fortunate comrades who had trouble reintegrating into society.⁶²

This initial objective of the VVLP prompted Webb to back the program immediately after its inception. He became a strong supporter and advisor to the program and volunteered as a mentor.⁶³ For the hyper-masculine Webb, the thought of leading his men once again had major appeal. Most importantly, he could assist them in the act of transforming into productive members of the community, maybe even community leaders, and move forward with what was his most significant goal, regaining control over their image.

Webb's success as a lawyer and a writer made him a poster boy for the efforts of the VVLP. The program's administrators saw him as a perfect example of how well

World Split Open: How the Modern Women's Movement Changed America (New York: Viking, 2000) and John D' Emilio and Estelle Freedman *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America* (New York: Harper and Row, 1988). Additionally, for a good discussion of how men of all walks of life dealt with the changes brought about by women's liberation see, Michael Kimmel, *Manhood in America: A Cultural History* (New York: Free Press, 1996), 261-328.

⁶² "Announcement of Vietnam Veterans Leadership Program, July 30, 1981," Memo from Tom Pauken to Dave Gergen; File: Announcement of Vietnam Veterans Leadership Program, 11/10/1981 (2) F027; Box 31: Dole, Elizabeth H. Files, Series XII Events, F026, F027; Ronald Reagan Library.

⁶³ Sheila Caudle, "Vietnam vets give their buddies helping hand," *USA Today*, December 27, 1982. Advisor information found in a list of VVLP participants attached to "Meeting with Vietnam Veterans Leadership Program Representatives, November 9, 1981;" File: Announcement of Vietnam Veterans Leadership Program 11/10/1981 (1) F027; Box 31: Dole, Elizabeth H. Files, Series XII Events, F026, F027; Ronald Reagan Library.

Vietnam veterans could fare once they returned to their everyday life.⁶⁴ Their official biography of the former Marine highlighted his major achievements from his extraordinary time at Annapolis to his time as a Marine commander to his successes after the war. Webb was to the VVLP the Vietnam veteran made good.⁶⁵

Webb also pinned his hopes on the ability of the program to highlight that traditional element of the martial tradition often overlooked in Vietnam veterans: the martial brotherhood.⁶⁶ The camaraderie possessed by the men of other wars was a major element of the tradition of martial masculinity.⁶⁷ However, this type of fellowship among those who served in Southeast Asia was often overlooked until after the dedication of the Vietnam Wall and the popular veterans parades of the 1980s that illustrated its existence to Americans. Webb hoped the mentorship involved in the VVLP would bring this brotherhood's reality to the forefront, further supporting the notion that veterans of the war were just like their predecessors.

This type of camaraderie among Vietnam veterans, according to Webb, was the hallmark of VVLP efforts. The brotherhood that remained among them after the war worked as a coping mechanism for them, solidifying a sense of community that eased

⁶⁴Journalist Myra McPherson in *Long Time Passing: Vietnam and the Haunted Generation* (Garden City, NJ: Doubleday, 1984) suggests "Conservative activist veterans—preachers of Vietnam as a noble cause and often right wing when it comes to questions of current military intervention—like to present the rosier of Vietnam veteran statistics." 572.

⁶⁵ "Author Voices Support For Vet Program" Statement regarding James Webb; File: Announcement of Vietnam Veterans Leadership Program, 11/10/1981 (2) F027, Box 31: Dole, Elizabeth H. Files, Series XII Events, F026, F027; Ronald Reagan Library.

⁶⁶ Webb as quoted in "Author Voices Support For Vet Program."

⁶⁷ A good examination of martial camaraderie is John C. McManus, *The Deadly Brotherhood: The American Combat Soldier in World War II* (Novato, CA: Presidio, 1998).

their mistreatment by the American public. Webb called this communal comfort “a delicious secret among those who had served, a reservoir of strength,” since they could not talk publicly about their experiences without shame. The power of this network became stronger as the years went on, and especially “for those lucky enough to stay in contact with fellow veterans, it became heady stuff, the glue of a fierce, unbending friendship.”⁶⁸

The brotherhood at home signified the ability of Vietnam veterans to overcome the social stigmas placed on them and to move forward with their domestic duties, in Webb’s estimation.⁶⁹ He, the VVLP, and the community of veterans proved that they were not men to be pitied or men to be thought of as less virile because of their time spent fighting in the losing battle of Vietnam and its effects at home. They were, for the most part, successful men who had the strength to overcome any obstacle the same way those who participated in World War II took advantage of the G.I. Bill to become upstanding and productive male members of society. If some Vietnam veterans did not successfully reintegrate, maybe it was the fault of those who did not welcome them home and the responsibility of their successful brothers to make sure they did.

As Webb melded the agenda of the VVLP with his own to promote the masculine image of the Vietnam veteran, he and the organization worked in tandem “to honor the validity of service to country” and illustrate the normalcy of the men who returned from

⁶⁸ James Webb, “When a One Armed Man is Not a Loser,” *Parade Magazine*, November 21, 1982. http://jameswebb.com/editorials_articles/parade-onearmedmannoloser.html.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

the conflict.⁷⁰ He believed if the country could accept them as normal and successful members of society, their manhood, and the symbolic manhood of all Vietnam veterans would be elevated to the heights of their predecessors in the martial tradition. For Webb, this was another piece in the puzzle to establish their nobility. There was only one piece left: a symbolic, national recognition of their valorous efforts in the war.⁷¹

The Noble Warrior: Solidifying the Masculine Honor of the Vietnam Soldier

In the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, Webb seemed to find a vehicle for melding the conflict's American participants with the martial tradition. However important it was to him, though, he also helped turn what was already a difficult endeavor into a tug of war over control of its design. The eruption of the ideological argument between conservatives such as Webb, who supported strong political meaning for the monument, and the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund (VVMF), which strived for an apolitical tribute to the war's dead, threatened to halt its creation. In the years of struggle that followed, one thing remained certain: James Webb vehemently wanted a national monument to honor his comrades and to restore their martial manhood, as long as it was on his own terms.

Because of Webb's views regarding the reverence owed to Vietnam veterans, it seemed fitting that he be a part of the VVMF and the creation of the memorial. Therefore, it was not surprising when Jan Scruggs, enlisted his help early on, as he gathered funds

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

and worked to create public support for what would become the Wall. Webb recalled that Scruggs and other members of the organization approached him during a promotional tour for *Fields of Fire* in 1979, to ask for his support, and he “resolved to help them.”⁷² By that summer, the former marine had become an unofficial member of the VVMF, giving “advice, counsel, and participation” to the organization, mainly regarding financial and legal issues.⁷³

At first, the relationship between Scruggs and Webb seemed genial and quite necessary, given the immense amount of ideologically broad assistance needed to create a national monument for a war most Americans wanted to forget. As leader of the VVMF, Scruggs recognized the importance of having successful and well-connected veterans such as Webb within the organization. When he wrote to Webb officially asking the former Marine to join the VVMF’s National Sponsoring Committee, Scruggs emphasized that his presence and approval for the project would “add immeasurably to the prestige and credibility of our efforts.”⁷⁴

⁷² “Personal Statement written by James Webb for use in Jan Scruggs’ biography,” January 17, 1984; File: Office Files, Memorial Design, Controversy and Criticism, Webb, James, 1980-1984; Box 32, Office Files, 1979-1985; *Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund Records, 1965-1994*; Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

⁷³ “Letter from Robert Doubek to James Webb, August 24, 1979;” File: Files of the Project Director, Memorial Design, Controversy and Other Problems, Webb, James H., 1980-81; Box 63: Files of the Project Director, 1965-1984; *Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund Records, 1965-1994*; Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

⁷⁴ “Letter from Robert Doubek to James Webb, January 10, 1980;” File: Files of the Project Director, Memorial Design, Controversy and Other Problems, Webb, James H., 1980-81; Box 63: Files of the Project Director, 1965-1984; *Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund Records, 1965-1994*; Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.. Doubek reiterates these points in a letter to Webb on February 29, 1980. File: Box 32: Office Files, Memorial Design, Controversy and Criticism, Webb, James,

As it turned out, Webb's affiliation with the VVMF became more trouble than it was worth after the unveiling of Maya Lin's design for the memorial. The winning design, two large slabs of black granite with the names of those who perished etched into them, made little sense to Webb, and he felt it threatened his plan to establish the nobility of all who served. As a result, somewhere near the center of the firestorm created by the design, a battle that divided the veteran and the conservative community alike was James Webb and his notions of a new martial manhood.

Webb voiced concern immediately after the VVMF revealed the design. As Scruggs remembered it, "[t]he first rumblings had started close to home. Shortly after Maya Lin's first press conference, James Webb—who had considered himself unqualified to sit on the [design] jury—said Maya Lin's design was unacceptable. 'Why is it black?' he asked. 'Why is it underground?'" These questions haunted the VVMF as Webb and others began to call the Wall design the "Black Gash of Shame."⁷⁵

A few months later, in September 1981, Webb recommended to the VVMF that Lin alter the design by placing a flag at the site of the memorial and adding an inscription that referred to the nobility of the war. He told the main members of the VVMF that he would oppose any final product that did not contain these modifications. Writing to Robert Doubek, the executive director of the VVMF, he "emphatically" maintained that

1980-1984; Box 32, Office Files, 1979-1985; *Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund Records, 1965-1994*; Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

⁷⁵ The use of this phrase originated with Tom Carhart. He noted his disdain for the memorial's design by writing, "By this will we be remembered: a black gash of shame and sorrow, hacked into the national visage that is the Mall." Tom Carhart, "Insulting Vietnam Vets," *New York Times*, October 24, 1981. Quotes from Scruggs, Jan C. and Joel L. Swerdlow, *To Heal a Nation: The Vietnam Veterans Memorial* (New York: Harper and Row, 1985), 80.

individuals who supported the Memorial tended to desire a “strong correspondence between this memorial and the war.” He claimed he did not want to insert himself in the actual design and placement of these components because of his lack of experience with architecture; but he wanted them to know “how important” he and the American public found these modifications.⁷⁶

A few weeks later, Webb’s tone changed, and he demanded the changes, telling Scruggs, “I do not like the winning design; in fact, I feel insulted by it. But I have been operating by default, as something of a moderating influence on people who are rabidly opposed to it, and who wish to destroy the project all together.” He promised he had no desire to halt the project completely because he understood its importance, but he had become terribly apprehensive about its current incarnation that did not “honor and recognize all who served in Vietnam.”⁷⁷

Webb felt the VVMF purposefully wanted to neglect the soldiers’ roles as honorable male warriors as a way to prevent stirring up old controversies and generating ill will toward the project. He warned Scruggs, “understatement is not called for when we are dealing with the heroic and honorable loss of life.”⁷⁸ Webb threatened Scruggs, if the

⁷⁶ “Letter from James Webb to Robert Doubek, September 6, 1981;” File: Box 32: Office Files, Memorial Design, Controversy and Criticism, Webb, James, 1980-1984; Box 32, Office Files, 1979-1985; *Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund Records, 1965-1994*; Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. Webb states this idea comes from “such diverse commentators as the Marine Corps League, on the one hand, and the New Republic from the other.”

⁷⁷ “Letter from James Webb to Grady Clay (Editor of Landscape Architecture Magazine), November 16, 1981;” File: Office Files, Memorial Design, Controversy and Criticism, Webb, James, 1980-1984; Box 32, Office Files, 1979-1985; *Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund Records, 1965-1994*; Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

⁷⁸ Scruggs, Jack Wheeler, and Robert Doubek all agreed to keep politics and opinion out of the Memorial. Scruggs and Swerdlow, *A Time to Heal*, 12. Moreover, Wheeler expressed to all involved in

VVMF continued to refuse to incorporate his personal desires for the project “this is as far as I can go,” with the organization.⁷⁹

The VVMF never responded, officially, to any of the suggestions Webb made regarding design. When it became evident to him nothing would happen without a significant fight, the former Marine escalated his efforts and initiated a political battle to alter the design of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. Fed up with the lack of consideration from the VVMF over his and others’ concerns, Webb began his crusade to fix the monument.⁸⁰

In late November 1981, the issue came to a head. Webb privately wrote to Scruggs to tell him he decided to remove himself from the fund’s efforts “for so long as this design continues to be the plan for the Memorial” and that he would take legal action if the fund used his name or suggested he backed the project in its current incarnation.⁸¹

creating the Wall to “never take a political position or express views on Vietnam –related subjects,” *A Time to Heal*, 30. The point was to keep the Memorial above the fray of the plethora of opinions about the war.

⁷⁹ “Letter from James Webb to Grady Clay (Editor of Landscape Architecture Magazine), November 16, 1981.” Webb suggests a white memorial and the placement of a flag in this letter.

⁸⁰ “Letter from James Webb to Jan Scruggs, Scruggs, December 2, 1981.” Webb outlines why he thinks the VVMF is ignoring his complaints after Scruggs wrote to him on the same day wondering why Webb thinks he is being ignored. Webb tells Scruggs he had spoken with Wheeler and Doubek who told him to hold tight because “there would be significant changes in the design” that never came. Wheeler also told him there would be negotiations on the design, so he withheld an op-ed piece from *The Washington Post* criticizing the Wall design, but those negotiations never occurred. He indicates he is “disappointed” that the VVMF is not listening to those who do not like the design and, in some instances, are attacking those people. Scruggs letter reference: “Letter from Jan Scruggs to James Webb, December 2, 1981.” Both letters found in File: Office Files, Memorial Design, Controversy and Criticism, Webb, James, 1980-1984; Box 32, Office Files, 1979-1985; *Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund Records, 1965-1994*; Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

⁸¹ “Letter from James Webb to Jan Scruggs, November 24, 1981.” Webb reiterates this threat of legal action in another letter to Scruggs on December 2, 1981. Both documents found in File: Office Files, Memorial Design, Controversy and Criticism, Sherwood Carlton Rebuttal, Supporting Documents, Vol. 3, 1979-1983, nd.; Box 32, Office Files, 1979-1985; *Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund Records, 1965-1994*; Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Three days later, he officially resigned from the National Sponsoring Committee and demanded that the VVMF remove his name from all of its literature because of his problems with the design.⁸²

After he cut ties with the organization, Webb turned to his talent as a writer to begin a public campaign criticizing the Wall's design, the VVMF, and Scruggs. He hoped to make enough of a stir that it would force the VVMF to make the additions. His first attack came in the form of an editorial piece printed in the *Wall Street Journal*, he was the first of many conservatives to present his opinion on the Wall to Americans.⁸³

Appearing on December 18, 1981, the article, simply titled "Reassessing the Vietnam Veterans Memorial," took the VVMF to task for its approval of Maya Lin's "memorial only to the dead." As a veteran of the war and a significant participant in the early stages of solidifying support for the fund, Webb believed he had as much of a right as anyone to criticize a memorial that was "...a nihilistic statement that does not render honor to those who served."⁸⁴

The lack of conservative political meaning irked him as well, suggesting that it let its viewers make up their own minds about the war. The design missed the opportunity

⁸² "Letter from James Webb to Jan Scruggs, November 24, 1981."

⁸³ Other conservatives to publically express displeasure with the design early on were Tom Carhart "Insulting Vietnam Vets," *New York Times*, October 24, 1981 and "A Better Way to Honor Viet Vets," *Washington Post*, November 15, 1981; Patrick J. Buchanan, "A Memorial Ditch on the Mall," *Ludington Daily News* (syndicated column), January 6, 1982 and "A Crypt on the Mall," *Ludington Daily News* (syndicated column), February 6, 1982.

⁸⁴ James Webb "Reassessing the Vietnam Veterans Memorial," *Wall Street Journal*, December 18, 1981.

to memorialize “heroic and honorable loss of life” and symbolically signify the nobility of all who served in the war. To create respect for all who served, the “...design should not be neutral.” Webb wrote, because “we are invading for all time the privacy of those who perished in the war by publishing their names on the memorial, and this should not be done except in the most affirmative sense of honor and recognition.”⁸⁵

According to Webb, the VVMF’s rigid stance on the design put him and other veterans in a difficult situation. They could either accept the design as it stood or withdraw their support from the memorial, leaving them on the opposing side of the only major national commemoration of the Vietnam War to date. Frustrated by the no-win situation placed in front of him, Webb pled to the American public, “What is one to do? Is any memorial better than no memorial? At what point does a piece of architecture cease being a memorial to service and instead become a mockery of that service, a wailing wall for future anti-draft and anti-nuclear demonstrators?”⁸⁶

Webb’s opinions and those of other conservatives regarding the Vietnam Veterans Memorial caused enough of a stir for the federal government to step in, reluctantly. Secretary of the Interior, James Watt, the official that Congress charged with overseeing the project, ordered new talks on the design. During this re-evaluation, Webb worked for the changes he desired, making his thoughts known in a written statement to the Fine Arts Commission overseeing the talks.⁸⁷

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Strong discussions of the compromise process can be found in Robert Schulzinger, *A Time for Peace: The Legacy of the Vietnam War* (Oxford University Press, 2006), 95-109 and Patrick Hagopian, *The*

Webb insisted in his statement that modifications to the design were necessary and to “honor and recognize those who served.” He also stressed, the VVMF be forced to consult the opinions of more Vietnam veterans because a personal understanding of the war was imperative in order to create an appropriate monument that gave little credence to the limited perspective of those who did not serve.⁸⁸

Webb knew the perspectives of Vietnam veterans created problems too, but their input would create the best scenario, in his estimation, because others are “only now beginning to assimilate Vietnam in a context that breaths dignity into the acts of those who served.” He condemned the VVMF for leaving veterans out of the process because, as “[t]his monument will last into the eons . . . it will reflect the incomplete assimilation process of the judges . . . rather than making the definitive healing statement we all had so hoped for.”⁸⁹

With some simple changes, he believed the monument would have a different tone, one that emphasized honor. An onsite American flag was the most important modification to Webb, although he would have liked what he called “artifacts of war” included too. He indicated that the flag, especially if placed at the apex of the monument, “would symbolize the coming together of all factions, under the unity of our system of

Vietnam War in American Memory: Veterans, Memorials, and the Politics of Healing (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2009), 166-201.

⁸⁸ Webb’s written statement to the U.S. Fine Arts Commission, October 12, 1981. File: Office Files, Memorial Design, Commission of Fine Arts Meetings, Feb 8, 1983; Box 29: Office Files, 1979-1985; *Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund Records, 1965-1994*; Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

laws and values.” He also wanted the monument raised above the ground and/or changed to a white stone, which he believed would remove any unacceptable connotations of shame or dishonor brought about by the original design’s “black hole in the ground” appearance.⁹⁰

Webb recognized that a full rejection of the design “would probably injure the efforts of the VVMF to build any monument whatsoever,”⁹¹ so his goal was to force the VVMF to construct a monument that met his personal requirements for attaching martial honor and traditional military symbolism to the men who served the United States in the war. This lack of desire to stop the creation of the memorial reflected his concern that starting from scratch would be the death knell for the any type of national monument for the Vietnam soldier. But it also illustrated a deep-seated personal belief that memorialization was a significant key to establishing honor for those who served.⁹²

In an opinion piece written for the *Washington Post* on Memorial Day, 1981, Webb argued, “there is strength to be gained from remembering” those who made the ultimate sacrifice for their country. Although Webb does not specifically mention the Vietnam War in “The Power of Remembering,” he consistently hints at it, thinly disguising his comments. The Japanese reverence of their warriors is Webb’s focus, as

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Strong works on the issue of memorialization and the Vietnam War include Patrick Hagopian, *The Vietnam War in American Memory*; Kristin Hass, *Carried to the Wall*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); Marita Sturken, *Tangled Memories: The Vietnam War, the AIDS Epidemic, and the Politics of Remembering*, (Berkeley: University of California, 1997); and Fred Turner, *Echoes of Combat: The Vietnam War in American Memory*, (New York: Anchor Books, 1996).

he grapples with the question of how the participants in such a war could maintain their masculine nobility in the eyes of the nation. He asks, “How could a nation beaten on the battlefield find meaning and momentum in the events of its defeat?”⁹³

The ability of the Japanese to separate military service from the act of war, according to him, is the answer. The nation’s capacity for venerating those who fought in a failed war and their recognition of them via memorials, he suggests, set them on a path to restrengthening themselves in the post-war world.⁹⁴ Memorials particularly created a situation in which “[i]t was as if each death involved a transfer of energy, the soul of the soldier feeding into the soul of the nation, until the very enormity of Japan’s defeat became itself the fuel for its post-war re-emergence.” The lesson taught by the citizens of Japan and their ability to overcome their loss in World War II, was a faith in the “spiritual power of commemoration and the nobility of military service.” They, unlike Americans, learned to separate their “dedicated warriors” from the outcome of the conflict.⁹⁵

These ideas regarding commemoration lend further explanation to why Webb rejected the original design of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. Although he believed in using the memorialization of others to help create that separation between the warrior and his war, the Lin design made that memorialization too emotionally heavy. The Wall, as it stood, in black granite, “a nihilistic slab of stone” as he called it, put too much emphasis

⁹³ James Webb, “The Power of Remembering,” *The Washington Post*, November 25, 1981.

⁹⁴ For an examination of Japan after its defeat in World War II, see John W. Dower, *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1999), while for an overview of Japanese Warrior culture see, Thomas Cleary, *The Japanese Art of War: Understanding the Culture of Strategy* (Boston and London: Shambhala Books, 1992).

⁹⁵ James Webb, “The Power of Remembering,” *The Washington Post*, November 25, 1981.

on the darkness of the war, the domestic conflict surrounding it, and its penchant for ripping apart the fabric of American society and its tradition.⁹⁶

Even though commemoration of death was an important part of memorializing the war, Americans strong feelings about the conflict would keep them from understanding any subtle messages that might be contained in Maya Lin's design. A way to assist them would be to connect the Wall to American values and nationalism. If the VVMF refused to change the design, Webb knew he had to make sure the American public got the point and realized the value of the warrior of Vietnam. Adding patriotic elements to the memorial that validated the service, and therefore the nobility, of the men who served in Vietnam were, in his estimation, the only ways to achieve this goal.

Eventually, the parties involved in the fight over Maya Lin's design for the Vietnam Veterans Memorial reached the interesting compromise in March 1982 that included Frederick Hart's statue, "The Three Soldiers." The design of the monument would not change, but they VVMF would add an inscription in the granite and place a flagpole on site, set far enough away as not to disrupt the monument's architectural integrity.⁹⁷

⁹⁶ "Letter from James Webb to Jan Scruggs, December 2, 1981."

⁹⁷ "Vietnam Veterans' War Memorial Compromise Reached Warner Says," Press Release from United States Senate: Office of John Warner, March 24, 1982; File: Office Files, Public Relations, Media, Press Releases, 1980-1984; Box 51: Office Files, 1979-1985; *Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund Records, 1965-1994*; Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. According to the initial compromise, the flag was to be placed at the apex of the Wall and the statue was supposed to be installed in front of it. Moreover, there are two inscriptions etched into the Wall. The first reads: "In honor of the men and women of the Armed Forces of the United States who served in the Vietnam War. The names of those who gave their lives and of those who remain missing are inscribed in the order they were taken from us." The second reads: Our nation honors the courage, sacrifice, and devotion to duty and country of its Vietnam veterans. This memorial was built with private contributions from the American people. November 11, 1982."

One sees James Webb's imprint on the final design modifications, differences that enhanced the national and martial symbols of the Wall. The sculptor of "The Three Soldiers," Frederick Hart declared, "If it were not for him, none of those changes would have taken place."⁹⁸ The true meaning of the Wall for James Webb went well beyond Jan Scruggs' desire to promote healing and to wash away the stain of the war on its veterans. To him, the memorial solidified the honor, nobility, and martial manhood of those who served, regardless of the outcome of their war, and placed them in the martial tradition that defined the nation and its exceptional nature.

For perspective on the dedication of Hart's statue in 1984, *The Washington Post* interviewed James Webb. Reluctantly, he gave the Wall some credit for helping troubled veterans overcome their psychological scars, but he added that their plight should not define the memorial.⁹⁹ The VVMF's desire to make the monument what he considered a wailing wall disrespected those who served and made them look effeminate and weak in the eyes of the nation. If that became the main perception of the Wall, Webb worried it could rob them of their manhood for good and disastrously affect America and its exceptional nature.

With the dedication of the statue, though, it was now time to bury the controversy and move ahead. Earlier in 1984, Webb wrote to Scruggs to tell him of the futility he saw in keeping the controversy alive, indicating that the VVMF might learn from those

⁹⁸ Brad Lemley, "Never Give an Inch: James Webb's Struggle with Pen and Sword."

⁹⁹ Elisabeth Bumiller, "The Memorial, Mirror of Vietnam: The Lives the Monument Touched, the Passions It Aroused, and the Statue that May Speed the Healing," *The Washington Post*, November 9, 1984.

who promoted the theme of nobility throughout the design dispute. He claimed, “I am very satisfied with the compromise, and in fact feel that we in the ‘dissent’ have done a valuable service, not only to our country, but to the Memorial as well . . . the starkness of the wall now has context . . . and I have moved on.”¹⁰⁰

The end result of the Vietnam Wall seemed to close a chapter for James Webb. From that point, his focus centered on his career, as though he stepped back to see the fruits of his work develop. Earlier in the 1980s, he lost his chance to head the Veteran’s Administration when he was not nominated, a job he might have turned down after it became clear that the Reagan administration was not interested in his attitude or his inevitable and, possibly, singular focus on helping Vietnam veterans.¹⁰¹ In May of 1984, he became Assistant Secretary of Defense for Reserve Affairs, a post he left to become the Secretary of the Navy.

As naval secretary, Webb focused on shoring up the Navy and the American military from the effects of a war that “dealt a vicious whiplash to those who sacrificed so much in the name of duty and country,” but he would not get much time to make changes.¹⁰² Less than a year later, Webb resigned in a huff due to ideological problems with Secretary of Defense Frank Carlucci that included disagreements over policy in the

¹⁰⁰ “Letter from James Webb to Jan Scruggs, January 27, 1984;” File: Office Files, Memorial Design, Controversy and Criticism, Webb, James, 1980-1984; Box 32, Office Files, 1979-1985; *Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund Records, 1965-1994*; Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

¹⁰¹“ Ex-Marine Webb Leading Candidate for VA Director,” *Washington Post*, April 2, 1981. Webb mentioned during the process he was “upset at the way the VA has been run and...he would give more attention to readjustment problems of Vietnam veterans

¹⁰² George C. Wilson, “Navy Secretary Webb Again Sworn In,” *The Washington Post*, May 2, 1987.

Middle East and hard feelings over a slashed budget that would stall efforts to expand the Navy. Many suggested Webb's "stubborn and uncompromising" personality did him in.¹⁰³

Regardless of these efforts for the military, Webb's writings on the war, his participation in the remasculinization of the returned veteran, and his role in the creation of a respectful national memorial brought the former Marine's campaign for nobility full circle. The masculine honor of the Vietnam veteran had been solidified symbolically; now it was up to the American public to absorb it as the truth. As for the Wall, in a 1985 interview he confessed his continued disdain for the process that ignored his agenda. Asked if he ever visited the memorial, the future Democratic senator from the state of Virginia claimed, "I don't go. I'm still too mad."¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³ Defense Department officials as quoted in Molly Moore, "Navy's Webb Quits, Blasts Carlucci: Budget Cuts, Lack of Leadership Cited," *Washington Post*, February 23, 1988. Defense department officials called into question his ability to be a team player. The article also outlines how he and the Reagan administration argued over Persian Gulf policy that relied heavily on the Navy to protect Kuwaiti oil tankers, much to Webb's chagrin.

¹⁰⁴ Brad Lemley, "Never Give an Inch: James Webb's Struggle with Pen and Sword."

CHAPTER FIVE

SALVAGING THE AMERICAN MARTIAL TRADITION: THE REAGAN ADMINISTRATION AND THE POSITIONING OF THE VIETNAM SOLDIER WITHIN THE NATION'S FOLKLORE OF MILITARISM

It is time we recognized that ours was, in truth, a noble cause...[w]e dishonor the memory of 50,000 young Americans who died in that cause when we give way to feelings of guilt as if we were doing something shameful, and we have been shabby in our treatment of those who returned. They fought as well and as bravely as any Americans have ever fought in any war. They deserve our gratitude, our respect, and our continuing concern.

Ronald Wilson Reagan, August 18, 1980¹

On November 11, 1988, Ronald Reagan observed his last Veteran's Day as President of the United States. The outgoing commander-in-chief, in a speech much like any given by a president on the day reserved to honor those who fought for the United States, spoke of Americans' reverence and gratitude for the sacrifices of those who gave their lives in service of their nation. He declared, "what they died for was worthy of their sacrifice—faith, too, in God and in the Nation that has pledged itself to His work and to the dream of human freedom, and a nation, too, that today and always pledges itself to their eternal memory."²

The difference in 1988, however, was the location of this speech, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. When tens of thousands of American veterans of the Vietnam War

¹ Ronald Reagan, "Peace: Restoring the Margin of Safety," A Speech to the Veterans of Foreign Wars Convention, Chicago Illinois, August 18, 1980, *The Public Papers of President Ronald W. Reagan*, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/reference/8.18.80.html>.

² Ronald Reagan, "Remarks at the Veteran's Day Ceremony," November 11, 1988, The Miller Center (University of Virginia), <http://millercenter.org/president/speeches/detail/3417>.

gathered to dedicate the new monument in a weekend-long “National Salute to Veterans” six years prior, Reagan chose not to attend any formal events, save a brief appearance at the National Cathedral during the reading of the names of those who died in the conflict.³ Now at the end of his eight-year tenure, he stood at the Wall defining them and the veterans of all American wars as “what we can only aspire to be: giving, unselfish, the epitome of human love to lay down one's life so that others might live.”⁴

Though Reagan encountered some hostile reactions during this official visit to the memorial, particularly in relation to his lack of action on the POW-MIA issue, the scheduling of a formal Veteran’s Day ceremony and presidential remarks at the Wall underscored vast changes that had taken place in the national narrative of the war over the course of Reagan’s presidency.⁵ The president and his administration’s role in these changes, although often suggested as a means to gain support for foreign policy endeavors in Central America, stemmed from their larger desire to rebuild the nation’s faith in its military tradition and its presumed exceptional nature.⁶ The reestablishment of

³ Ed Bruske and Kenneth Bredemeier, “Vietnam War Dead’s Names Read, Remembered,” *Washington Post*, November 11, 1982.

⁴ Reagan, “Remarks at the Veteran’s Day Ceremony,” <http://millercenter.org/president/speeches/detail/3417>

⁵ Michael York, “Reagans Pay Emotional Visit to Vietnam Veterans Memorial; Fate of the Missing Haunts Ceremony,” *The Washington Post*, November 12, 1988.

⁶ A strong discussion of the theory that the Reagan administration wanted to break down the “Vietnam Syndrome” occurs in political scientist William LeoGrande’s work *Our Own Backyard: The United States in Central America, 1977-1992* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), specifically see pages 3-9. For a good, brief discussion of Reagan’s reasons for creating a role for the United States in Latin America, see Abraham F. Lowenthal, “Ronald Reagan and Latin America: Coping with Hegemony in Decline,” in *Eagle Defiant: United States Foreign Policy in the 1980s*, eds. Kenneth A. Oye, Robert J. Lieber, and Donald Rothchild (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1983), 311-335.

these elements of the American mythology, they hoped, would restore America's image in the wake of the Vietnam War.

Through numerous events in the 1980s, the Reagan administration worked to wed the American participants in Vietnam to the military valor so vital to American military tradition. By situating them in the same historical folklore as those who served in previous wars, the White House hoped the men of the most contentious military conflict in American history would gain the admiration of all Americans. The bestowal of this esteem on Vietnam-era soldiers and the reshaping of their image had the potential to lessen the scars the war and to rebuild the country's national and international image, saving the notion of "the shining city upon a hill."⁷

Reagan first acknowledged this quest during his failed presidential campaign in 1976, and revived it four years later as he faced incumbent president, Jimmy Carter.⁸ A strong supporter of the Vietnam War throughout the conflict, Reagan noted in a speech to the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) Convention in the summer of 1980 that he

⁷ Reagan often directly and indirectly referred to the "shining city upon a hill" theory about the United States. "A Time for Choosing, October 24, 1964," (also known as "The Speech"), <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/reference/timechoosing.html>; "To Restore America, Ronald Reagan's Campaign Address, March 31, 1976," <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/reference/3.31.76.html>; "Republican National Convention Acceptance Speech, July 17, 1980," <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/reference/7.17.80.html>. All speeches from *Ronald Reagan Presidential Library and Museum* website. "Inaugural Address, January 20, 1981," *The Public Papers of President Ronald W. Reagan*. Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1981/12081a.htm>. Historian Paul Kengor writes about Reagan's faith and its connection to American mythology in *God and Ronald Reagan: A Spiritual Life*, (New York: Regan Books, 2004).

⁸"To Restore America, March 31, 1981 " <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/reference/3.31.76.html> and various 1980 campaign speeches can be found at http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/major.html#.UyfK6_ldWSp. *Ronald Reagan Presidential Library and Museum*.

considered U.S. military efforts in Southeast Asia a “noble cause.”⁹ However, the hallmark of Reagan’s message in this speech and on the campaign trail was the need to restrengthen the country and its image after the trauma of the 1960s and its supposed further weakening during the presidency of Jimmy Carter. The combination of these issues damaged the United States’ position in the world and all but destroyed America’s faith in itself, according to the former actor and governor of California.¹⁰

As ardent nationalists, the central figures of the Reagan administration, who often had strong differences of opinion regarding foreign policy endeavors, were of one mind about the preservation of the American traditions and ideals that supposedly led to the country’s supremacy in the world.¹¹ Their reshaping of what the Vietnam War meant to America became an attempt shore up and sustain the country’s martial tradition by enveloping the soldiers of Vietnam into the same valorous history of those men who defended the nation through the ages. The often nameless, faceless, men of the Vietnam War, who according to Reagan, “fought as well and as bravely as any Americans have

⁹ Ronald Reagan “Peace: Restoring the Margin of Safety,” <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/reference/8.18.80.html>.

¹⁰ Michael Schaller discusses the Reagan plan to restrengthen America and the effects of this plan in *Reckoning with Reagan* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992). A discussion of American desires for “remasculinization” and restrengthening during this period is discussed in Susan Jeffords, *The Remasculinization of America: Gender and the Vietnam War* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1989).

¹¹ Michael Schaller, *Right Turn: American Life in the Reagan-Bush Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 79-85. The most important memoirs of administration officials charged with foreign policy decisions are: Alexander M. Haig, Jr. *Caveat: Realism, Reagan, and Foreign Policy* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1984; Constantine C. Menges, *Inside the National Security Council: The True Story of the Making and the Unmaking of Reagan’s Foreign Policy* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988); Donald T. Regan, *For the Record: From Wall Street to Washington* (San Diego: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1988).

ever fought in any war,” would become the administration’s focal point for reestablishing confidence in the fabled American nation, both at home and abroad.¹²

Putting the Valorous Veteran Front and Center: The Symbolism of the Congressional Medal of Honor and the Vietnam Veterans Leadership Program

Soon after the president took office, the Reagan administration marked its first official step in its campaign to wed the American soldiers of the Vietnam War to the country’s time-honored tradition of military valor. A mere five weeks to the day of his inauguration, in a highly-visible ceremony, Reagan presented the Congressional Medal of Honor, the highest decoration of the American military, to a veteran of the Vietnam War. Meticulously planned by the White House, every aspect of the event was meant to draw the attention of the public to the fact that the Reagan administration was willing to publically honor a member of the most vilified group of veterans to fight in a foreign war.

The storied background of the Congressional Medal of Honor fit perfectly with the desire of the Reagan administration to position Vietnam soldiers within the historical framework of the martial tradition. The history and prestige of this honor dates back to the Civil War, while the actual tradition of decorating valorous American soldiers dates back to the Revolution. The first military honor for the lower ranks of the army was the Badge of Military Merit, the modern day Purple Heart, established by General George Washington in 1782.¹³

¹² Ronald Reagan, “Peace: Restoring the Margin of Safety,” <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/reference/8.18.80.html>.

¹³ “Facts about the Army Medal of Honor,” No date, Folder: Medal of Honor Ceremony, WH Staff Member Files, Speechwriting, [White House Office of]: Speech Drafts, 1981-1989, Address to Joint

Although this decoration for the lower ranks waned after the Revolution, the Civil War, in particular, brought back the desire to honor all valorous military men, and in 1862, Abraham Lincoln signed into law the establishment of a Congressional Medal of Honor.¹⁴ The criteria for the medal changed over the years, but by World War I, Congress solidified the modern meaning of the award, noted by President Reagan in his remarks: “The President may award . . . a Medal of Honor to a person who . . . distinguishes himself conspicuously by gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty.”¹⁵

The field reports of how Sergeant Roy P. Benavidez met these criteria for the Medal of Honor underscored the type of bravery the Reagan administration wanted to highlight in the Vietnam soldier and contradicted the way many Americans viewed participants of the conflict.¹⁶ During an in-country rescue mission in May of 1968, Green

Session (02/18/1981 [4 of 5] to National League of Cities (03/02/1981) [2 of 3]; Box 3: WH Staff Members File, Speechwriting, [White House Office of]: Speech Drafts, 1981-1989; *Ronald Reagan Presidential Library*. Additional information from U.S. Army Center of Military History, <http://www.history.army.mil/html/reference/purhrt.html>. The first Congressional Medal of Honor given to a participant in the Vietnam War was in 1964 to Cpt. Roger H.C. Donlon. It is not the author’s contention that Vietnam era soldiers did not receive such accolades. The argument is that the Reagan administration took the opportunity to make Benavidez’s honor a highly public to highlight an agenda.

¹⁴ In 1847, Congress established the Certificate of Merit in order to acknowledge the meritorious actions of privates. The Medal of Honor initially was only for privates and non-commissioned officers. Information on this issue and additional information on the Congressional Medal of Honor from The Congressional Medal of Honor Society, <http://www.cmohs.org/medal-history.php>. A listing of all Congressional Medal of Honor recipients can be found on the *Congressional Medal of Honor Society* website <http://www.cmohs.org/recipient-archive.php>.

¹⁵ In 1897, the words with “gallantry and intrepidity” were added, as well the qualification for testimony from an individual who witnessed the event and the addition of a rule that the veteran could not nominate himself. Information on this issue from The Congressional Medal of Honor Society, <http://www.cmohs.org/medal-history.php>. Additional information from “Facts about the Army Medal of Honor.”

¹⁶ There are two published autobiographies of Sergeant Benavidez: Roy R. Benevidez and Oscar Griffith, *The Three Wars of Roy Benavidez* (San Antonio, TX: Corona Publishing, 1986) and Roy P. Benavidez and John R. Craig, *Medal of Honor: One Man’s Journey from Poverty and Prejudice* (Sterling, VA: Brassey’s, Inc., 1995).

Beret Benavidez saved eight members of a Special Forces team and recovered the bodies of several more, all while under heavy fire. He suffered gunshot and shrapnel wounds from head to toe, including a nearly severed arm and a gruesome wound to his abdomen.¹⁷ Although initially turned down for not meeting some of the award's technical criteria, the Joint Chiefs of Staff unanimously approved his nomination for the medal in 1980.¹⁸

The decision to decorate Benavidez for his actions provided the Reagan administration with an official opportunity to present its message about Vietnam and on February 24, 1981, the Medal of Honor ceremony for Benavidez took place at the Pentagon. Standing in the Hall of Heroes, Ronald Reagan emphasized the valor of this new recipient of the Medal of Honor and highlighted the nobility of all who served in the war. Although the soldiers of Vietnam were not “permitted” to win by the government, Reagan declared, they were “a group of American fighting men who had obeyed their country’s call and who had fought as bravely and as well as any Americans in our history.” But unlike those before him, Reagan lamented, the Vietnam veteran received

¹⁷ On May 2, 1968, a team of Special Forces encountered trouble during an intelligence mission near Loc Ninh, Vietnam. Several attempts to rescue these men failed. Benavidez volunteered to go on the next rescue attempt. He dragged dead and wounded to waiting aircraft. By the end of rescue mission, Benavidez had gunshot wounds or shrapnel in his arms, legs, face, abdomen, and head. His left arm hung almost severed from his body and he has a wound in his abdomen. He saved the lives of eight men, recovered the bodies of many soldiers, and retrieved all of the classified documents that could have been lost. Information from “Official Medal of Honor Citation for Master Sergeant Roy P. Benavidez United States Army, Retired,” Folder: Medal of Honor Ceremony; Box 3: WH Staff Member Files, Speechwriting, [White House Office of]: Speech Drafts, 1981-1989, *Ronald Reagan Presidential Library* and Lou Cannon, “President Awards Medal, Says Troops Weren’t Permitted to Win in Vietnam,” *The Washington Post*, February 25, 1981.

¹⁸ At first, it was believed Benavidez did not fully meet the criteria, because there was supposedly only one eyewitness to his actions. However, in 1980, another witness came forward to corroborate his actions. Lou Cannon, “President Awards Medal,” *The Washington Post*, February 25, 1981.

“no parades, no bands, no waving of the flag they had so nobly served,” and never were thanked, respected, or honored for their service.¹⁹

The short five-minute speech discussed how many of them acted above and beyond their normal duties while in Southeast Asia. Specifically, he mentioned humanitarian efforts of American servicemen who spent a great deal of time assisting the women and children of South Vietnam, rather than merely fighting.²⁰ These soldiers helped to build schools and hospitals, distributed food and toiletries, and often did so with their own money. Americans at home, he said, ignored such gallantry and “it is now time to show our pride in them and to thank them” for all they did.²¹

Reagan then read the citation that told the harrowing story of Sergeant Benavidez’s actions twelve years earlier. The final lines read: “His fearless leadership, tenacious devotion to duty, and extremely valorous actions in the face of overwhelming odds were in keeping with the highest traditions of the military service, and reflect the utmost credit on him and the United States Army.”²² For Reagan, each of these words described that nameless, faceless soldier of the war, the man so mistreated and

¹⁹ Ronald Reagan, “Remarks on Presenting the Medal of Honor to Master Sergeant Roy P. Benavidez, February 24, 1981,” *The Public Papers of the President Ronald W. Reagan*, Ronald Reagan Library, <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1981/22481d.htm>.

²⁰ Civic Action programs by the United States occurred throughout South Vietnam. They included the building of schools, roads, medical facilities, and more. They also focused on health issues and public information. However, civic action was most focused on winning “hearts and minds” and pacifying the Vietnamese public. A good, personal look at the more helpful programs can be found in Gene Hays, *Civic Action, A True Story: Marines Fighting a Different War in Vietnam* (Ronald E. Hays II, 2002). However, scholars have focused strongly on the pacification efforts like the Phoenix Program that gathered intelligence on NLF members and civilians sympathetic to them. Those individuals might simply be interrogated or they may be imprisoned or killed. A good look at this program can be found in Douglas Valentine, *The Phoenix Program* (New York: Morrow, 1990).

²¹ Ronald Reagan, “Remarks on Presenting the Medal of Honor to Master Sergeant Roy P. Benavidez.”

²² Ibid.

disregarded by the American people. Moments later, the president pinned the medal to the Benavidez's chest.

Although other veterans of the war received the award before Benavidez, the nature of Reagan's remarks in the ceremony highlighted the administration's larger agenda. Washington Post columnist, and early Reagan biographer Lou Cannon, termed the ceremony "a platform for declaring the United States had lost the war in Vietnam because its soldiers had not been permitted to win."²³ In stressing this, Cannon was correct but he missed the larger symbolic meaning. The president had placed the participants in the "noble cause" of Vietnam—soldiers who had received so little support after their return, men who many Americans considered incompetent embarrassments—front and center. He had portrayed them as heroic and fearless. Far more than making excuses for the loss of the war, the administration designed the Medal of Honor ceremony as a platform for salvaging and reinvigorating the American martial tradition via the Vietnam veteran.

The major revision that the Reagan administration had in mind for the collective image of the Vietnam War-era soldiers could not take shape with a simple ceremony, though. If it was to make public perceptions of these men similar to those of veterans of other wars, a significant reshaping of the negative stereotypes that many Americans held toward Vietnam veterans needed sustained attention. These opinions of those who served in Vietnam extended to their ability to reintegrate into American society. The significant problems experienced by some Vietnam veterans as they tried to reenter society amplified negative perceptions of them and created greater concerns among conservative

²³ Lou Cannon, "President Awards Medal."

about the long-term effects of the war on the martial tradition. Reintegration problems even more so separated the recently return veteran from those of earlier wars, men who won their wars, retained their warrior images, and, with the exception of World War I veterans, made a seamless reintegration into their daily lives upon their return home.²⁴

The strongly engrained societal belief that Vietnam veterans were crazed losers made the Reagan administration's placement of them in the martial tradition more difficult.²⁵ Moreover, the negative perceptions of their masculinity due to their role in the loss of the war augmented this difficulty. These issues led the Reagan administration to support a new program for veteran assistance, the Vietnam Veterans Leadership Program (VVLP), meant to bring troubled Vietnam veterans together with highly successful comrades who could mentor them through their long journey to reenter the "world."²⁶

The VVLP also had a much broader social agenda that appealed to the Reagan administration. The creator of the program, Tom Pauken, suggested in a memo to the White House staff that the activities of the VVLP would go a long way to debunk

²⁴It is important to note that Americans did not feminize or treat World War I veterans as weak men over any difficulties with reintegration and mental health issues. One, these issues stemmed from the addition of new technologies and chemical warfare. Two, and most importantly, these men won their war. Strong examinations of the experiences of the doughboys include: Jennifer D. Keene, *Doughboys, the Great War, and the Remaking of America* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001); David M. Kennedy, *Over Here: The First World War and American Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982); and Robert H. Zieger, *America's Great War: World War I and the American Experience* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000); Also, a good look at commemoration of the First World War is Steven Trout, *On the Battlefield of Memory* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2010), particularly pages 144-193.

²⁵ Good examinations of the notion that Vietnam veterans were emotionally unstable include: Jerry Lembcke, *The Spitting Image: Myth, Memory, and the Legacy of Vietnam* (New York University Press, 1998), 101-126; Fred Turner, *Echoes of Combat: The Vietnam War in American Memory* (New York: Anchor Books, 1996), 44-70; and Patrick Hagopian, *The Vietnam War in American Memory* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2009), 49-78.

²⁶ "The Vietnam Veterans Leadership Program," June 30, 1981, Folder: Vietnam Veterans Leadership Program, ACTION: VVLP, 11/10/1981; OA 9089, Blackwell, Morton C: Files; *Ronald Reagan Presidential Library*.

stereotypes of Vietnam veterans as “guilt-ridden victims” not to mention “dope addicts, killers, and/or fools.”²⁷ In fact, the parent agency of the VVLP, the national volunteer organization ACTION, argued that the chief reason for the creation of the program was to help Americans “recognize that Vietnam veterans are a leadership resource, not a group to be pitied or to be treated as victims.” If successful, the program would affirm “the integrity of military service during the Vietnam War” and “help to restore a national perception that military service is an honorable calling.”²⁸

Because of its potential to restore to Vietnam veterans their rightful place within the mythology of the American military tradition, President Reagan approved the Vietnam Veteran Leadership Program in July 1981. Immediately, the administration opted to create a high profile Veterans Day event at the White House in which the president would formally announce it.²⁹

A presidential briefing memo regarding the event indicates that the main reason the White House decided to announce the program publically was its significant emphasis on the merit of Vietnam veterans. The administration also liked the idea of using the success of the mentors to reshape opinions about all veterans of the war.³⁰ Elizabeth Dole, director for the White House Office of Public Liaison, avowed that the event would

²⁷ “Vietnam Veterans as Volunteers,” Memo from Thomas W. Pauken to Ann Fairbanks, et al, May 11, 1981; Folder: Vietnam Veterans Leadership Program, ACTION: VVLP, 11/10/1981; OA 9089, Blackwell, Morton C: Files; *Ronald Reagan Presidential Library*.

²⁸ “The Vietnam Veterans Leadership Program,” June 30, 1981.

²⁹ “Announcement of Vietnam Veterans Leadership Program,” Memo from Tom Pauken to Dave Gergen, July 30, 1981; Folder: Vietnam Veterans Leadership Program, ACTION: VVLP, 11/10/1981 (1); OA 9089, Blackwell, Morton C: Files; *Ronald Reagan Presidential Library*.

³⁰ “Meeting with Vietnam Veterans Leadership Program,” Memo from Elizabeth Dole, November 6, 1981; Folder: Vietnam Veterans Leadership Program, ACTION: VVLP, 11/10/1981 (2); OA 9089, Blackwell, Morton C: Files; *Ronald Reagan Presidential Library*.

“stimulate public notice of the emerging leadership role of the nation’s Vietnam veterans.”³¹ The stage was set for a public unveiling of a program that had a significant opportunity to influence Americans’ understanding of the masculine nature of those who served in Vietnam.

Invited guests for the ceremony included exactly the type of men the VVLP and the administration were trying to highlight, men who had reached great heights in business, government, and society after the war.³² They included future senator John McCain, who had just retired from his career in the Navy; James Webb; and Reagan aide and chairman of the Vietnam Veteran Memorial Fund, John “Jack” P. Wheeler—men whose heroic service to country and significant post-war success exemplified the country’s military tradition.³³ As Wheeler suggested to the White House, each of the men selected to represent the successful veteran would “reflect very, very positively on the President.”³⁴

³¹ “Meeting with Vietnam Veterans Leadership Program,” Memo from Elizabeth Dole, November 6, 1981.

³² “List of Participants from Meeting with Vietnam Veterans Leadership Program,” Memo from Elizabeth Dole, November 6, 1981; Folder: Vietnam Veterans Leadership Program, ACTION: VVLP, 11/10/1981 (2); OA 9089, Blackwell, Morton C: Files; *Ronald Reagan Presidential Library*.

³³ Each of the men listed achieved hero status during the war. McCain spent almost five years as a prisoner of war. Part of McCain’s story can be found in John McCain and Mark Salter, *Faith of my Fathers: A Family Memoir* (New York: Random House, 1999) as well as Robert Timberg, *John McCain and American Odyssey* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1999). Webb earned a Navy Cross for heroic action in Vietnam. Part of his story is recounted in Robert Timberg, *The Nightingale’s Song* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995). Wheeler was a member of the West Point class of 1966 that inspired Rick Atkinson’s book *The Long Gray Line* (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1989). It is important to note that each of these men entered the military through military academies.

³⁴ “Note from Jack P. Wheeler to Morton Blackwell, September, 20, 1981;” Folder: Vietnam Veterans Leadership Program, ACTION: VVLP, 11/10/1981 (1); OA 9089, Blackwell, Morton C: Files; *Ronald Reagan Presidential Library*.

When Reagan took to the podium on November 10, 1981 to unveil the project, highlighting its actual services seemed a mere footnote to the true task at hand. Although he claimed the leadership program would “provide guidance for those with lingering problems,” the majority of his remarks referred to the administration’s greater message. “On this eve of Veterans Day in 1981,” Reagan began the ceremony, “we meet to inaugurate a program that’s aimed at helping a group of veterans who have never received the thanks they deserved for their extraordinary courage and dedication.” The men who participated in the war, he continued, “fought as bravely as any American fighting men have ever fought.” They were soldiers who “did their duty and demonstrated courage and dedication in the finest tradition of the American military in a war they were not allowed to win.”³⁵

An examination of the administration’s interaction with the VVLP over the years illustrates that it primarily viewed the VVLP as a tool to re-shape the image of the Vietnam veteran. The president rarely met with the project’s leaders between late 1981 and the expiration of its federal funding in September of 1984.³⁶ Any publicized meeting

³⁵ Ronald Reagan, “Remarks of the President at the Announcement of Vietnam Veterans Leadership Program, November 10, 1981;” Folder: Vietnam Veterans Leadership (Rohrbacher), 11/10/81; Box 21: WH Staff Member and Office Files, Speechwriting; White House Office of: Speech Drafts, 1981-1989; Vietnam Veterans Leadership (11/10/81) – Address to Nation (11/18/1981-11/21/1981); *Ronald Reagan Presidential Library*.

³⁶ When ACTION leader Tom Pauken asked for a meeting between Reagan and members of West Coast VVLP coordinators in May of 1982, suggesting that a meet and greet could coincide with a new push by the organization to describe veteran volunteerism as a “living memorial” to veterans, the White House declined. Pauken’s request seen in “West Coast Presidential Briefing on Vietnam Leadership Program,” Memo from Tom Pauken to Morton Blackwell, March 5, 1982; Folder: Vietnam Veterans Leadership Program-ACTION: Vietnam Veterans Leadership Program, 05/31/1982; OA 9089, Blackwell, Morton C.: Files; *Ronald Reagan Presidential Library*. White House rejection of meeting seen in “Schedule Proposal between Elizabeth H. Dole and Gregory J. Newell, April 20, 1982;” Folder: Vietnam Veterans Leadership Program-ACTION: Vietnam Veterans Leadership Program, 05/31/ 1982; OA 9089, Blackwell, Morton C.: Files; *Ronald Reagan Presidential Library*.

that did take place only focused on congratulating the men involved in the program for their efforts and their presumed success. The administration gave little help to the VVLP, if assistance meant something other than using the program as a platform for recasting the image of the veteran.³⁷

In the final year of federal sponsorship of the program, the White House held a short reception for the VVLP.³⁸ Over 150 veterans participated in the event meant to thank them for their efforts and “recognize the leadership role of the nation’s Vietnam veterans.”³⁹ Reagan, for one final time, used the opportunity to exalt the war’s soldiers both in combat and at home. Near the end of his speech, he wove together the recent accomplishments of this group of Vietnam veterans with their previous “loyalty” and “commitment” to the nation during the war.⁴⁰ The door closed on the administration’s

³⁷ Journalist Myra McPherson argues, “Conservative activist veterans—preachers of Vietnam as a noble cause and often right wing when it comes to questions of current military intervention—like to present the rosier of Vietnam veteran statistics.” *Long Time Passing: Vietnam and the Haunted Generation* (Garden City, NJ: Doubleday, 1984), 572. More importantly, many of these veterans were a part of the VVLP. The organization raised great concerns about its understandings of veterans from the Vietnam War due to this rosy picture of successful veterans. McPherson suggests throughout her book that veterans of all political persuasions felt the VVLP did create a sense of camaraderie among them. However, it is clear the objectives of the program were in line with its leader Pauken’s conservative leanings, 286.

³⁸ In January 1983, the White House invited over 100 participants in the VVLP invited to a thank you ceremony. Information from “Schedule Proposal between Elizabeth H. Dole and William K. Sadleir, January 19, 1983;” Folder: Vietnam Veterans Leadership Program, ACTION: VVLP, 11/10/1981 (2); OA 9089, Blackwell, Morton C: Files; *Ronald Reagan Presidential Library*.

³⁹ “Schedule Proposal between Faith Whittlesey and Frederick J. Ryan, Jr., February 3, 1984;” Folder: 03/01/1984 Vietnam Veterans Leadership Reception; Box 138: WH Staff and Member Files: Speechwriting, White House Office of: Research Office, 1981-1989, 02/27/1984 Taping National Association of Manufacturers-03/02/1984 Conservative Political Action Committee (2); *Ronald Reagan Presidential Library*.

⁴⁰ “Presidential Remarks: Reception for Vietnam Veterans Leadership Program, March 1, 1984;” Folder: Reception for Vietnam Veterans, March 1, 1984; Box 25: WH Staff Member and Office Files, Dolan, Anthony “Tony” R.: Files, 1981-1989, Series I: Speech Drafts 1981-1989, State of the Union 1/25/1984 (Part II) to Reception for National Newspaper Association 03/28/1984; *Ronald Reagan Presidential Library*.

utilization of the program to reshape American opinions of those who served in the war, without consideration of its tangible results for veteran reintegration.

Priming the Public and Avoiding Controversy: Reagan and The Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund

The VVLP thanked Reagan with “heartfelt appreciation for his loyalty to and support of Vietnam Veterans,” for the duration of the program, declaring him “an honorary Vietnam Veteran.”⁴¹ This symbolic pronouncement was a strange honor for a variety of reasons. The president’s concern for the men who fought in the war merely amounted to rhetoric, as his dealings with the Veterans Administration illustrated throughout his two terms.⁴² The bestowal of this title on Reagan was an obvious media tool for the VVLP, considering the limited amount of support the administration actually gave to the program’s assistance measures.

Early on, it was evident that the administration had little use for the program, even in terms of its rhetorical value and ability to change Americans opinions of Vietnam veterans. This had largely to do with the creation of the highly successful Vietnam Veterans Memorial in the early 1980s. By 1984, when the federal version of the VVLP petered out, the Wall had been open to the public and assisting the White House in its

⁴¹ “Letter from Catherine Fenton to Gahl L. Hodges, Feb 29, 1984;” Folder: Reception for Vietnam Veterans Leadership Program, OA 12156, 3/01/1984; Box 1: Collection: Fenton, Catherine S.: Files, Contents OA 12156, 170581, 17059, 17062, 17063, 17064, *Ronald Reagan Presidential Library*.

⁴² A short discussion of the Reagan administration and the Veteran’s Administration’s treatment of veterans with PTSD and those suffering from the effects of Agent Orange can be found in Robert D. Schulzinger, *A Time for Peace: The Legacy of the Vietnam War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006) 84 and 91-93. A discussion of Reagan and the VA’s treatment of Vietnam veterans is found throughout Myra McPherson’s *Longtime Passing*, but the most eloquent occurs on pages 609-610. She states, “Behind the ceremonial flag waving, however, it is very hard to find anything constructive that either Reagan or Congress has done for Vietnam veterans,” 609.

campaign to change Americans' understanding of the war's participants for almost two years. Although the process to erect the memorial proved bumpy for everyone involved, the contention of the administration was that it was a necessary component of Reagan's campaign to save the martial tradition.

Although the administration backed its completion, the project did without a significant amount of public support from the President from day one. Much like the administration's superficial participation with the VVLP, its role in the creation of the Vietnam Wall was minimal and always calculated to fit the White House's agenda regarding the martial tradition.

In the administration's eyes, the eventual point of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial was to take away the sting of the war and honor its participants, not to rehash the domestic conflicts created by it. Therefore, just as William Westmoreland believed, they felt it should be as non-controversial as possible. When the project became contentious, the White House turned as much of a blind eye as it could. If Vietnam and its veterans were to become a positive part of national history and the American military tradition, the administration believed the country had to bury the pain associated with the war, rather than analyze it.⁴³

The Reagan administration and the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund's (VVMF) leaders had a similar objective regarding the Wall, the honor and recognition of those who served. However, the White House had minimal interest in taking on a role to

⁴³ Patrick Hagopian argues that the VVMF and the Reagan administration had very similar goals in respect to burying the pain associated with the war. Although they "did not share the same political agenda . . . their agendas coincide at one significant point: their wish to draw the sting out of memories of Vietnam and unify a nation divided by the Vietnam War." *The Vietnam War in American Memory*, 17.

promote it in any major way, preferring instead to wait and reap any symbolic benefits the memorial might bring.⁴⁴ A lack of visible participation in VVMF events and a lack of strong administrative support was a hallmark of the early days of the memorial project, although it lent a modicum of assistance to solidify a connection to the project, once completed.⁴⁵

The administration's first major denial of the VVMF was in response to chairman Jan Scruggs' request for a presidential appearance at a Memorial Day 1982 service at the future site of the Wall. Correspondence between administration officials indicates some concern about focusing on Vietnam alone on Memorial Day, rather than centering efforts on American soldiers as a whole. This signified the White House's wait-and-see attitude toward the monument and its possible ability to reignite or quell the controversies of the war. As one member of the administration wrote, "If the P. is going to be in Washington that day, we'll be doing the POW's dinner and have addressed the Vietnam issue. Further...it would seem more appropriate for him...to go to the Tomb of the Unknown Soldiers in Arlington and pay tribute to all vets...I would hate for his day to be spent on such somber subjects."⁴⁶

⁴⁴ According to Hagopian, Reagan and his advisors chose to move away from the "noble cause" effort and move toward rhetoric of healing during this time. Although this new stance "aroused less controversy" especially as he turned to "lauding those who fought," the administration knew it needed to step back and let others handle the issue of reconciliation. *The Vietnam War in Modern Memory*, 15-16.

⁴⁵ One of the first rejections of major public support came when the President and the First Lady did not attend the reception that publically unveiled Maya Lin as the architect and the memorial's design on May 6, 1981. "Letter from Jan C. Scruggs to President Reagan (regret noted on letter), April 30, 1981;" "Letter from Jan C. Scruggs to First Lady Nancy Reagan, April 16, 1981;" note showing regret phoned in on April 30, 1981 all sources from Folder: Vietnam Veteran Memorial Fund (2); Box 59: Collection: WHORM Alpha File, Contents U-Vig, LOC 02710815; *Ronald Reagan Presidential Library*.

⁴⁶ "Memo from TR (Thomas Reed) to Greg (Gregory Newell), March 20, 1981;" Folder Vietnam Veteran Memorial Fund (2); Box 59: Collection: WHORM Alpha File, Contents U-Vig, LOC 02710815; *Ronald Reagan Presidential Library*.

From its actions, it appears that the Reagan administration wanted the VVMF left on its own in order to keep the administration away from rehashing negative aspects of the war. Yet, as much as they wanted to avoid a major connection to the Wall, the White House also knew it could not seem against memorialization of the war. Such a stance would have been counterproductive to their efforts.

Therefore, the administration lent help in small doses that kept it from getting heavily involved in an official way. In early 1981, they accepted a role for the first lady as a board member of the VVMF National Sponsoring Committee. Keeping with the rhetorical message of the president, Mrs. Reagan stated she accepted the position because she believed the memorial would “be a symbol of recognition” for the efforts and sacrifices of the men who participated in the war.⁴⁷ “The time is long overdue,” she declared, “for the nation to recognize the sacrifices of those who served in Vietnam” and recognition of them at the Washington Mall would extend American gratitude and support to all living veterans.⁴⁸ Assistance to the VVMF by Nancy Reagan, however, always remained at this fundraising level, as requests for personal attendance at events met with consistent rejection.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ “Press Release from Office of the First Lady’s Press Secretary, February 17, 1981;” Folder: Release on Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund 2/17/81, OA 6026; Box 1: First Lady, Office of: Press Office Records, Collection—First Lady, Press Office: Records, Contents OA 6025-8550, LOC 122/13/1; *Ronald Reagan Presidential Library*.

⁴⁸ “Message from Mrs. Nancy Reagan for VVMF Radiothon, May 8-10, 1981;” Folder: WHORM Subject File: WE 004, 023809; LOC 28/6/6; *Ronald Reagan Presidential Library*.

⁴⁹ “Letter from Jan C. Scruggs to First Lady Nancy Reagan, May 14, 1981” and note saying she regretted by phone on May 19, 1981. Both documents from Folder: Vietnam Veteran Memorial Fund (2); Box 59: Collection: WHORM Alpha File, Contents U-Vig; LOC 02710815; *Ronald Reagan Presidential Library*. This minimal support seemed to wane even more after controversy erupted regarding the design of the project. A good instance of this came about when the First Lady’s staff denied a major request from Scruggs to discuss the design and meet architect Maya Lin. They rejected the call from Scruggs due to the

Even without strong, official support from the administration, Scruggs and the VVMF were able to break ground on the memorial on March 26, 1982. Reagan was absent from the ceremony, even though Scruggs asked him to participate and deliver a speech keeping with the White House's rhetorical themes of recognition and dedication to service.⁵⁰ However, the president's disregard for the groundbreaking was no longer simply due to the desire to maintain distance from the unproven Wall; it was now linked to a brewing controversy over the selection of Chinese-American architect Maya Lin's design for the memorial.⁵¹

Because of the nature of Lin's design, black granite engraved with the names of the fallen, serious questions arose about what the memorial meant, what it was to convey, and how it would honor the fallen and the living veteran. These discussions brought up old controversies, issues that the VVMF wanted to circumvent and the White House wanted to bury. At this point, the design had the potential to destroy not only the project, but also the Reagan administration's desire to place the Vietnam soldier within the American legacy of military service and valor.

Even though the administration hoped to stay out of any political issues regarding the memorial, the squabbles over Lin's design forced it to engage on some level, lest the

First Lady's supposedly jam-packed schedule. Information from "Letter from Jan C. Scruggs to First Lady Nancy Reagan, December 2, 1981" and "Letter from Ann Wroblewski to Jan C. Scruggs, December 15, 1981;" Folder: Vietnam Veteran Memorial Fund (2); Box 59: Collection: WHORM Alpha File, Contents U-Vig.; LOC 02710815; *Ronald Reagan Presidential Library*.

⁵⁰ "Letter from Jan C. Scruggs to President Reagan, March 19, 1982;" Folder: Vietnam Veteran Memorial Fund (2); Box 59: Collection: WHORM Alpha File, Contents U-Vig; LOC 02710815; Ronald Reagan Presidential Library. The president's regrets are noted on letter.

⁵¹ *New York Times* printed a contemporary interview with Maya Lin on June 29, 1981: B. Drummond Ayers, Jr., "A Yale Senior, a Vietnam Memorial, and a Few Ironies." A recent biography of Lin is Donald Langmead, *Maya Lin: A Biography* (Santa Barbara, CA: Greenwood, 2011), Langmead discusses the Wall design and controversy on pages 89-105.

project and its larger ambitions crumble. What was most troublesome for the White House was the fact that those who turned against the chosen design of the project were fellow conservatives such as Pat Buchanan and James Webb.⁵²

As Webb did in late 1981, Buchanan expressed his issues with the Vietnam War Memorial in the syndicated editorial “The Crypt on the Mall” released on January 20, 1982. He argued the aesthetics of the Wall carried with them a liberal agenda to subvert the true history of the war. That agenda was not to honor the men and women who served in the war, as the Congress intended when it approved the memorial, but to etch in stone a “final statement” on the conflict. This “unwritten” meaning of Lin’s supposedly morbid, black, buried-in-the-ground design was, in Buchanan’s estimation was “these thousands died for nothing—and we are all responsible.”⁵³

That same month, White House officials discussed whether to block the Lin design. They clearly worried about the mournful nature of the memorial and its possible anti-war message too, but they also were frightened the monument never would be built, given the awakened controversy. Quickly, the administration decided it wanted small changes that addressed the complaints of those against the current incarnation, such as the inclusion of the flag and a more fitting inscription highlighting “Duty, Honor, and Country,” while leaving the design itself untouched. Settling on this compromise gave

⁵² Many conservatives rallied against the Lin design including Patrick Buchanan , veteran Tom Carhart, Rep. Henry Hyde (R-IL), oil tycoon H. Ross Perot, Vice Admiral James Stockdale, and veteran James Webb.

⁵³ Patrick J. Buchanan, “The Crypt on the Mall” copy of syndicated column in Folder: Natural Resources-PARKS-Vietnam Memorial [1of3]; Box 28: Collection Boggs, Danny: Files, Contents OA 11961; LOC 135/07/8; *Ronald Reagan Presidential Library*. Original article published on January 20, 1982.

them “a way out of the all-or-nothing controversy,” somewhat placating their conservative counterparts, while making sure the memorial did not stop in its tracks.⁵⁴

By the time the dedication of the Wall occurred in the fall of 1982, the Reagan administration had reverted to its minimized role in the memorial. In fact, during the numerous days of ceremonies surrounding the dedication of the Vietnam Wall, the president barely acknowledged the event, but not because the VVMF did not ask him to attend. The initial call for presidential participation came from the obvious source of Jan Scruggs, who asked Reagan to give the keynote speech at the formal dedication during the National Salute to Veterans weekend. He assured the commander-in-chief that the VVMF could “think of no greater honor than to have you address the veterans who served our country.”⁵⁵ But the White House declined the high-profile invitation.⁵⁶

What the administration did accept was a ceremonial title for the president and Mrs. Reagan to serve as Co-Chairman of the events surrounding the wall dedication, rather than any type of active participation. Scruggs presented the less formal role to the White House in June of 1982, when he told the president he was a perfect candidate for the “position” because of his consistent advocacy for those who served in Vietnam. Even

⁵⁴ Ibid. A similar discussion can be found in “Vietnam Veteran Memorial,” Memo from Richard T. Childress to William P. Clark, January 28, 1982; Folder: PA 002 Memorials and Monuments (059001-62000); WH Staff Member and Office Files, PA 002 059001-140000; *Ronald Reagan Presidential Library*.

⁵⁵ “Letter from Jan C. Scruggs to President Reagan, October 20, 1982;” Folder: Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund [1 of 2], OA 9090; Box 22: Blackwell, Morton: Files, Contents OA 9090; LOC 143/1011; Ronald Reagan Library.

⁵⁶ Regret posted on copy of the original letter from Scruggs to President Reagan, October 20, 1982, as well as in “Vietnam Vet Memorial,” Memo from Fred Ryan to Judy Pond, November 2, 1982; Folder: IV082 091240; WHORM Subject File IV082-IV083 (138418); LOC 028/03/5; *Ronald Reagan Presidential Library*.

a limited role such as this, according to Scruggs, would reinforce the “long-awaited, patriotic spirit of unity and reconciliation engendered by the memorial project.”⁵⁷

Even though the official position of the administration was to support the VVMF quietly, some within the White House wanted Reagan to make a stronger stand. They worked almost up to the last minute to convince him to accept the invitations, calling it the “right” thing to do. Elizabeth Dole, director of the White House Office of Public Liaison, suggested that the President at least go to Arlington to lay the wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown in conjunction with the salute, as did Allan Myer, a member of the National Security Council. Dole, in a memo to Special Assistant to the President, Morton Blackwell, expressed her anger over the President’s rejection of her proposal and his refusal to attend events surrounding the dedication of the Wall. “The veterans organizations all urged that the President speak at the November 13 dedication of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial,” Dole wrote, “but the President will be in Chicago that day for a tribute to his late father-in-law.”⁵⁸

Allan Myer believed “[t]he President should make a strong statement honoring the Vietnam veteran” for this Veteran’s Day, given the ceremonies formally dedicating the Wall. Myer pleaded with William Clark in early November to pressure the president to accept Dole’s request to visit Arlington, lay the wreath, and give a short speech. This type of participation, according to him, “would have been right on the mark.” If this plan

⁵⁷ “Letter from Jan C. Scruggs to President Reagan, June 23, 1982,” Folder: [National Salute to Vietnam Veterans], OA 9089; Box 21: Blackwell, Morton: Files, Collection: Blackwell, Morton, Contents OA 9088 (2 of 2), 9089; Loc 143/10/1; *Ronald Reagan Presidential Library*.

⁵⁸ “President’s Participation in Veterans Day Activities,” Memo from Allan A. Myer to William P. Clark, November 4, 1982; Folder: HO 114 111168; WHORM Subject File: Contents 10110-10116; Loc 0281/02/5; *Ronald Reagan Presidential Library*.

still remained unpalatable to Reagan, Myer argued, then he should at the very least use his weekly radio address as a vehicle to talk about the ceremonies at the Wall.⁵⁹

Eventually, the administration did bend to Myer's request for the president to devote his radio address to the subject of the memorial, and much of the finished product sounded like the president's typical rhetoric regarding the war. Reagan spoke words of gratitude for the sacrifices of the war's participants and asked the American public to realize that, because they answered the call to duty like the men of all other American wars, Vietnam veterans deserved recognition for their efforts. The monument, according to the president, "simple, but eloquent...will take its rightful place in America's history."⁶⁰

These remarks show a greater willingness of the administration to associate itself with the Wall in order to garner some of the credit for a rise in reverence for the Vietnam veteran that surely would take place over the dedication weekend. Reagan continued, in his radio address, that, in the last few years, "America began to awaken from a decade of pain...and slowly began to remember the Vietnam veteran." He alluded to his part in this, recalling the Congressional Medal of Honor ceremony for Sergeant Benavidez and commenting on the successes of the VVLP. Reagan proclaimed, "Our Vietnam veterans have taken their rightful place as leaders of our great land."⁶¹

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ronald Reagan, "Remarks by the President for a Radio Address on the Dedication of the Vietnam War Memorial, November 13, 1982;" Folder: PA 002 Memorials and Monuments (110001-112000); WH Staff Member and Office Files: PA Parks and Monuments, PA 002 059001-140000; *Ronald Reagan Presidential Library*.

⁶¹ Ibid.

For the VVMF, the White House also agreed to submit a message for the souvenir booklet handed out at the Wall's dedication. It highlighted the administration's long-standing message regarding participants in the war, thanking Vietnam veterans for their "valor" and "distinguished performance" in the conflict and confirming its pride in them. Reagan noted that the week of festivities surrounding the dedication gave Americans "an opportunity to reaffirm their heartfelt gratitude for the courage and devotion" for those who performed this marital duty for the country.⁶² Now, he believed, "they have earned the undying esteem and respect of all thoughtful and freedom-loving Americans for their overriding devotion and sense of duty to our nation."⁶³ The only other way the White House attached itself to the dedication of the Wall was a brief appearance by Reagan at a candlelight vigil at the National Cathedral, indicating the administration's continued desire to play it safe to dodge the controversies of Vietnam.

Over the years, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial did much to gain those who served in the war the respect they desired, but that reaction emphasized reverence not necessarily martial valor. The Reagan administration knew it needed an event that finally solidified the position of the soldiers of the Vietnam War within the hallowed folklore of American militarism, if the defeat of Vietnam's influence on the martial tradition were to occur. The Wall, a step toward this result, primed the American public for the final element of the administration's campaign.

⁶² "Official Message from Ronald and Nancy Reagan for National Salute to the Vietnam Veterans Souvenir Booklet;" sent to Roberta Pilk of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund, October 28, 1982; Folder: ME 002 107308; WHORM Subject File: ME 002 (088714-167329); Loc 028/04/6; *Ronald Reagan Presidential Library*.

⁶³ Ibid.

Saving the Martial Tradition through Symbolism: The Tomb of the Unknown Soldier

In 1982, while the debate over the design of the Vietnam Wall raged, the White House began discussing what they believed, eventually, would make the major link it desired between the Vietnam soldier and his martial predecessors. Members of the administration wanted to bury the remains of a Vietnam soldier in the nation's sacred Tomb of the Unknown as a final step in bringing him and his comrades into the American martial tradition.⁶⁴

Unlike the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, a monument specific to that war, the burial of a Vietnam soldier's remains within this sacred tomb would place him directly within a common and highly revered military tradition. The intention of the administration, therefore, was to give the participants in Vietnam an honor that was not exclusive to their generation. As Secretary of Defense, Casper Weinberger suggested, burial in the tomb was "the highest honor" that could be bestowed on the soldier.⁶⁵

Initially created by Congress in 1921, the tomb held the remains of an unidentified soldier from World War I, World War II, and the Korean conflict. In the summer of 1982, the entombment of a soldier from the Vietnam era became a priority for the Reagan administration. A statute passed in 1973 by Congress placed all power for the

⁶⁴ Unfortunately, there is a dearth of historical works on the American Tomb of the Unknowns. Language professor (Italian and French) Laura Wittman, writes about the creation of European versions and how they promoted healing in her book *The Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, Modern Mourning, and the Re-Invention of the Mystical Body* (University of Toronto Press, 2011).

⁶⁵ "Selection and Interment of an Unknown Serviceman from the Vietnam Era," Memo from Casper Weinberger to President Reagan, March 16, 1984; Folder: ND 007-01, 197819;" WHORM Subject File: Contents ND 007-01-ND 007-05; Loc 028/05/3; *Ronald Reagan Presidential Library*.

burying remains in the Tomb of the Unknowns in the hands of the Secretary of Defense.⁶⁶

Therefore, Weinberger was the primary force behind plans for the internment, and he wanted the administration to move forward with the process as soon as possible.⁶⁷

To make that happen, Weinberger began to court Reagan and others in an attempt to create an administrative consensus for proceeding with the burial. The defense secretary suggested to cabinet members that veteran organizations and leaders in Congress believed the time was right for the placement of the remains of a Vietnam era soldier in the tomb. Weinberger revealed that he advocated it, as well, particularly because he was convinced the Central Identification Lab of the United States Army, after ten years of extensive testing and investigation of remains, had identified the best candidate.⁶⁸

Rather than the opinions of administration officials stalling the process, what really stood in the way of burying an unidentified soldier of Vietnam in the tomb was apprehension from organizations dedicated to searching for prisoners of war (POWs) and soldiers missing in action (MIAs). They were concerned that such a ceremony would end public support for them because Americans (and possibly the administration) would view

⁶⁶ Statute paraphrased in "Selection of a Vietnam Unknown," Memo from Casper Weinberger to The Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs, August 23, 1982; Folder: 8206000, OX 90175, National Security Affairs Chronological File: Records; Box 2: Collection: NSA Asst. to the President for: Records, Chron File; Contents 8101039-8290703; Loc 154/01/2; *Ronald Reagan Presidential Library*.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid. A discussion of how the United States historically identified and continues to identify the fallen can be found in Michael Sledge, *Soldier Dead: How We Recover, Identify, Bury, and Honor Our Military Fallen* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004). This book discusses the Vietnam War, particularly the man buried in the tomb of the Unknowns, First Lieutenant Michael C. Blassie, on pages 124-129. The burial of a Vietnam soldier within the tomb is also discussed in Edward F. Murphy, *Vietnam Medal of Honor Heroes* (New York: Presidio Press, 2003), 272-277.

the ceremony as an official closing of the war.⁶⁹ They also raised an even more pressing concern: the possible future identification of the four sets of remains initially considered candidates for interment.

The apprehensions of the National League of Families of American Prisoners and Missing in Southeast Asia became apparent as soon as word began to spread about the administration's plans. The organization's initial concerns came from its Executive Director Ann Mills Griffiths who contacted Weinberger in July of 1982 to express the League's opposition. The director appealed to him to withdraw support because a "[c]ontroversy over qualifications" would undermine the very purpose of the memorial.⁷⁰

When the White House ignored her concerns, Griffiths accused the administration of "a conscious effort to obscure or eliminate identification data to meet political objectives."⁷¹ She implied that it had ordered the destruction of information and evidence about the four sets of remains in order to ensure the ceremony occurred. The political reasoning for placing a Vietnam soldier in the tomb was quite transparent, according to

⁶⁹ A good discussion of the American prisoners of war and those missing in action is Michael J. Allen, *Until the Last Man Comes Home: POWs, MIAs, and the Unending Vietnam War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009). Regarding the war's memory, Allen argues many activists representing these individuals "made it difficult for conservative leaders to resurrect prewar visions of national unity and or to wield military power with ease," 8. However hard those activists worked, it is clear they could not stop the interment.

⁷⁰ "Proposed Interment of an Unknown from the Vietnam Era," Memo from Ann Mills Griffiths (Executive Director of the National League of Families of American Prisoners and Missing in Southeast Asia) to Casper Weinberger (Secretary of Defense), July 26, 1982; Folder: 8206000, OX 90175, National Security Affairs Chronological File: Records; Box 2: Collection: NSA Asst. to the President for: Records, Chron File; Contents 8101039-8290703; Loc 154/01/2; *Ronald Reagan Presidential Library*.

⁷¹ "Letter from Ann Mills Griffiths to John O. Marsh (Secretary of the Army), August 11, 1982," Folder: 8206000, OX 90175, National Security Affairs Chronological File: Records; Box 2: Collection: NSA Asst. to the President for: Records, Chron File; Contents 8101039-8290703; Loc 154/01/2; *Ronald Reagan Presidential Library*.

the director, because the administration believed the event to be “a means to satisfy those Vietnam veterans who feel slighted.”⁷²

Griffiths’ comments were on the mark. The plans of the White House left no room for considering identification issues any further. Three of the four sets of remains had been disqualified. That left only one set of remains for possible burial that, according to Griffiths, had a high probability of identification, once the Vietnamese cooperated in re-surveying the area where they had discovered them.⁷³

The Secretary of Defense did not address her concerns, however, and in March of 1984, he informed the president it was time to proceed with the ceremony. He cited the continued support of veterans organizations and select congressmen, as well as the backing of other POW/MIA organizations. This greater acceptance, according to Weinberger, came about because of a new round of efforts to identify the remains held by the United States. After an “intensive effort,” he told Reagan, there was now a set of remains that “although not complete as we would like, meets the legal requirements...and therefore is qualified” for burial.⁷⁴

National Security Advisor, Robert McFarland, expressed the same sentiments to the president, stating that they had “slowed the interment action until we were absolutely sure that all records were available and the partial set of remains was truly

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ “Proposed Interment of an Unknown from the Vietnam Era.” This source also illustrates that Mills Griffith’s opposition coincided with initial opposition from the Central Identification Laboratory and the Joint Casualty Resolution Center.

⁷⁴ “Selection and Interment of an Unknown Serviceman from the Vietnam Era.”

unidentifiable.”⁷⁵ Regardless, the administration continued to receive protests from the National League of Families of American Prisoners and Missing in Southeast Asia, although no longer from Griffiths, who now approved of the plan.⁷⁶

Anne Hart, the Vice-Chairman of the League’s board, renewed the argument that going forward with the entombment would endanger efforts to find POWs and MIAs.⁷⁷ McFarlane, believing the board was merely acting out of concern “that interment will close the book on Vietnam and . . . the POW/MIA issue,” made a concerted effort to make sure the families of those missing or possibly held captive understood the importance of the interment as a tool to shed additional light on the plight of their loved ones.⁷⁸ Reagan stepped in to assure the vice-chairman that the administration’s “commitment to the issue of American servicemen prisoners or missing in Vietnam” would be “strengthened,” and the White House began to finalize the events surrounding the burial.⁷⁹

⁷⁵ “Selection and Interment of an Unknown Serviceman from the Vietnam Era,” Memo from Robert C. McFarland to President Reagan, March 27, 1984; Folder: ND 007-01 197819; WHORM Subject File; Contents ND 007-01-ND 007-05; Loc 028/05/3; *Ronald Reagan Presidential Library*.

⁷⁶ Protests noted in “Selection and Interment of an Unknown Serviceman from the Vietnam Era,” Memo from Robert C. McFarland to President Reagan, March 27, 1984 and “Letter to the National League of Families on the Interment of a Vietnam Unknown,” Memo from Robert C. McFarland to President Reagan, May 4, 1984; Folder: ND 007-01 204502; WHORM Subject File; Contents ND 007-01-ND 007-05; Loc 028/05/3; *Ronald Reagan Presidential Library*. Additionally, McFarland notes in the March 27 memo that “Mills Griffiths has been briefed fully and the League will now support moving forward.”

⁷⁷ “Letter from Anne M. Hart (Acting Chairman of the Board to the National League of Families of American Prisoners and Missing in Southeast Asia) to President Reagan, April 18, 1984,” Folder: ND 007-01 204502; WHORM Subject File; Contents ND 007-01-ND 007-05; Loc 028/05/3; *Ronald Reagan Presidential Library*.

⁷⁸ “Letter to the National League of Families on the Interment of a Vietnam Unknown,” Memo from Robert C. McFarland to President Reagan.

⁷⁹ “Letter from President Reagan to Anne M. Hart, May 7, 1984,” Folder: ND 007-01 204502; WHORM Subject File; Contents ND 007-01-ND 007-05; Loc 028/05/3; *Ronald Reagan Presidential Library*.

As they planned the ceremony, the administration took painstaking measures to ensure that the entombment followed the protocol for previous ones. The White House initially consulted the ceremonial unit of the Military District of Washington (MWD) and it advised two ceremonies: one at the Capitol Rotunda in which Reagan would give a eulogy and lay a wreath by the casket, the other, a funeral with full military honors at Arlington National Cemetery, presided over by the commander-in-chief. The MWD suggested this scenario particularly because it would follow and in many ways exceed the “historical precedent” set in 1958, when Vice-President Nixon delivered the eulogy at the funeral for the World War II and Korean War remains and President Eisenhower presided over their interment at Arlington.⁸⁰

These ceremonies greatly appealed to the White House, and it moved ahead with making them as historically symbolic as possible. Such attention to detail had much to do with simply wanting to live up to protocol, but it also indicates the administration’s desire to play up the event’s pomp and circumstance in order to prove and solidify the place of the Vietnam soldier within this tradition. In early May, Secretary of Defense Weinberger increased the ceremonies’ symbolism when he proposed the president issue a proclamation declaring a national period of mourning for the unidentified serviceman. Weinberger suggested it was more than appropriate, since, “[b]efore interring previous Unknowns the President declared a period of mourning while the Unknown lay in state in

⁸⁰ It is not the contention of this author that Reagan treated the interred soldiers’ memory or the ceremony any differently than Eisenhower, Nixon, or Woodrow Wilson. In fact, the contention is that he treated him exactly the same, which was a departure for how living and dead Vietnam veterans were treated throughout the nation. Information on the Reagan administration provided by “Ceremonies for the Unknown Serviceman of Vietnam Era, May 28, 1984,” Memo for Michael K. Deaver from Robert McFarlane, April 9, 1984; Folder ND 007-01 206464; WHORM Subject File; Contents ND 007-01-ND 007-05; Loc 028/05/3; *Ronald Reagan Presidential Library*. A synopsis of the 1958 ceremony is contained in Jack Raymond, “Unknowns of World War II and Korea are Enshrined,” *New York Times*, May 31, 1958.

the Capitol Rotunda.”⁸¹ He attached copies of the proclamations used by Dwight Eisenhower for the interment of the World War II and Korean War soldiers, well aware of the importance for the president of following in the famous general’s footsteps.⁸²

The events surrounding the Memorial Day weekend entombment thus started with an official proclamation from the president ordering flags around the country to half-staff. The document’s wording was a strong mixture of protocol and rhetoric that highlighted the valor of the American soldiers of the Vietnam War. Reagan officially instated a mourning period and suggested the “nameless” soldier would “be known well by his embodiment of that most noble of all sentiments – patriotism.”⁸³ But there would be another way these sacred remains would influence the nation, according to Reagan. Through the coming years, “there will be families from across the land,” he declared, “who will come to view this place. To them it will mean that their son, husband, or father, rests before them. And, in spirit, it will be true. For they, as we, know him well as one who, as Lincoln said at Gettysburg, gave his ‘last full measure of devotion.’”⁸⁴

Unlike the dedication ceremonies of the Vietnam Wall, it was necessary for the president to play a major role in the burial of the unknown soldier, if it was to have the impact desired by the administration. The early suggestions of a major presence by the

⁸¹ “Presidential Proclamation on the Vietnam Unknown,” Memo Casper Weinberger (Secretary of Defense) to President Reagan, May 3, 1984; Folder: ND007-01 197880; Collection: WHORM Subject File; Contents ND 007-01-ND 007-05; Loc 028/05/2; *Ronald Reagan Presidential Library*.

⁸²Ibid.

⁸³ “Presidential Proclamation 5195: Return and Final Interment of Unknown American Killed in Vietnam, May 1984;” Folder: ND 007-01 197819; WHORM Subject File; Contents ND 007-01-ND 007-05; Loc 028/05/3; *Ronald Reagan Presidential Library*.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

president at the ceremony in order to meet historical precedent indicate the significance of national symbols for their larger efforts of salvaging the American martial tradition. Moreover, the words delivered by the commander-in-chief were of the utmost importance, and Reagan's speechwriters wove together an intricate dialogue for the occasion, one designed to change Americans' understanding of Vietnam-era soldiers and veterans.⁸⁵

On Memorial Day 1984, President Reagan stood poised at the Capitol Rotunda for the hallowed first ceremony. He began his eulogy of the Unknown with the simple line, "An American hero has returned." The speech lasted only a few minutes, but in it, the president spelled out the character of the symbolic veteran as "the heart, the soul, and the spirit of America." He offered the gratitude of the nation for the sacrifice made by him and his comrades, presenting the new Unknown Soldier as a man who "accepted his mission and did his duty."⁸⁶ With these words and the ceremonial symbols of the nation, the commander-in-chief made his attempt to transport the men of Vietnam into the

⁸⁵ Only two of Reagan's speechwriters have written books regarding the administration and its rhetoric: Peggy Noonan, *What I Saw at the Revolution: A Political Life in the Reagan Era* (New York: Random House, 1999) and Peter Robinson, *How Ronald Reagan Changed My Life* (New York: Regan Books, 2003). Neither discusses the rhetoric topics of this chapter in any real depth. Strong scholarly examinations of Reagan's rhetoric include William Ker Muir, Jr. *The Bully Pulpit: The Presidential Leadership of Ronald Reagan* (San Francisco: ICS Press, 1992), and Wynton C. Hall, "The Great Composer: A Behind the Scenes Look at Ronald Reagan's Rhetorical Symphony," in *The Reagan Presidency: Assessing the Man and His Legacy* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2005), 167-179, but again they do not deal with the issue of the Vietnam War. The main book that analyzes Reagan's rhetoric regarding Vietnam veterans is Toby Glen Bates, *The Reagan Rhetoric: History and Memory in 1980s America*, (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2011), 44-63. Bates contends Reagan had a 25 year streak regarding his rhetoric about the Vietnam War with only subtle changes to it. He suggest Reagan never moved away from the noble cause idea. Although this runs counter to Hagopian's belief, this dissertation suggests Bates is right. Reagan merely stopped saying the word noble. Bates also discusses how Reagan blended discussions of movies, television, and the Vietnam War together.

⁸⁶ Ronald Reagan, "Remarks at a Ceremony Honoring an Unknown Serviceman of the Vietnam Conflict," May 25, 1984, *The Public Papers of the President, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library*, <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1984/52584c.htm>.

martial tradition. From this point forward, according to Reagan, upstanding Americans had a major responsibility to the Unknown of Vietnam to “protect the proud heritage now in our hands” and “not betray his love of country.”⁸⁷

Reagan’s speechwriters saved much of the rhetorical pomp and circumstance for the burial ceremony that followed at Arlington National Cemetery, however. With the backdrop of the national cemetery and the actual tomb, Reagan began: “Throughout America today, we honor the dead of our wars. We recall their valor and their sacrifices—we remember they gave their lives so that others might live.”⁸⁸

Referencing Abraham Lincoln’s words in the Gettysburg address, he noted the eloquence with which the war dead illustrate their loyalty to the country on Memorial Day and then married that sentiment to the healing powers of the Vietnam Wall. The dedication of the memorial, less than two years earlier, he professed, had led the country to feel as though “as a Nation we were coming together again and that we had—at long last—welcomed the boys home.” The men “who were never defeated in battle and were heroes as surely as any who have ever fought in a noble cause” finally had the chance to show the country they deserved to be respected for performing their duty for America.⁸⁹

According to Reagan, the unknown soldier was now one with those who perished before him in the name of the United States, a man who “is symbolic of all our missing...He saw the horrors of war but bravely faced them, certain his own cause and

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ronald Reagan, “Remarks at Memorial Day Ceremonies Honoring an Unknown Serviceman of the Vietnam Conflict, May 28, 1984,” *The Public Papers of the President*, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1984/52884a.htm>.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

his country's cause was a noble one." On this Memorial Day, it was now time "to embrace him and all who served us so well in a war whose end offered no parades, no flags, and so little thanks" for that service. In the future, he told the American public, the best way to live up to the gallantry of these soldiers and give value to their sacrifices would be "honoring their commitment and devotion to duty and country."⁹⁰

Near the end of his speech, Reagan made a final move to break down the traumas of the Vietnam War and to rectify the toll they took on Americans' understanding of the nobility of the martial tradition. His words serve as his final task in the campaign to preserve the country's martial tradition. Standing next to the tomb, Reagan argued that no matter how contentious the war had been the reputations of the men who fought in it should never be a part of that contention. The president then extended the country's hand to Vietnam veterans acknowledging, "[a] grateful nation opens her heart today in gratitude for their sacrifice, for their courage, for their noble service. Let us, if we must, debate the lessons learned at some other time; today we simply say with pride: Thank you dear son; and may God cradle you in His loving arms."⁹¹

With this, the book closed on the administration's attempt to curb Americans' distaste and disrespect for the men who served in the war. The influence of the president, his use of American national symbols, and the rhetorical merger of the symbolic soldier of Vietnam with his valorous predecessors, constituted a robust attempt by the president and his administration to reconfigure American perceptions of these men and their war in order to salvage the nation's image.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid.

Initially, there was an overwhelming and positive public response to the entombment of what would turn out to be the remains of First Lieutenant Michael J. Blassie.⁹² Although the administration preserved letters from a few public figures such as the National Commander of American Veterans (AMVETS), who called the interment “one of the most important days for this country in the past two decades,” the majority of the correspondence received by the White House came from Vietnam veterans, their families, and other Americans.⁹³ Special Assistant to the President and Director of Correspondence, Anne Higgins, sent a package full of thank you notes written to the president immediately after the ceremony to Reagan’s main assistant, Dick Darman, with the message, “the response to the President’s Memorial Day address has been very heartwarming...he might like to see these.”⁹⁴

All of the correspondence either thanked him for the honor the ceremony brought to the Vietnam veteran or the sense of pride it brought to America.⁹⁵ One praised Reagan

⁹² Tim O’Neil and Valerie Schremp, “Michael J. Blassie: St. Louisan’s Remains Were in Tomb of Unknowns, Blassie Family Had Sought Burial Here, DNA Analysis Confirmed His Identity,” *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, June 30, 1998 and Tim O’Neil, “No Longer Unknown: Family Will Bring Blassie Home and ‘Put Him To Rest’: Pentagon Officially Identifies Remains,” *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, July 1, 1998.

⁹³ “Letter from Robert Wilbraham to President Reagan, May 31, 1984;” Folder: ND 007-01 216023; WHORM Subject File; Contents ND 007-01-ND 007-05; Loc 028/05/3; *Ronald Reagan Presidential Library*. Other letters received from public figures include: Strom Thurmond who called the two days of ceremonies “very outstanding and most impressive,” “Letter from Sen. Strom Thurmond to President Reagan, May 29, 1984;” Folder: ND 007-01 216023; WHORM Subject File; Contents ND 007-01-ND 007-05; Loc 028/05/3; *Ronald Reagan Presidential Library*.

⁹⁴ “Note from Anne Higgins (Special Assistant Director to the President and Director of Correspondence) to Dick Darman, May 30, 1984;” Folder: SP885 228757; Box 221: WHORM Subject File, SP-SPEECHES, SP885-SP889 [215036]; *Ronald Reagan Presidential Library*.

⁹⁵ Quote is from “Telegram to Richard Childress (National Security Council) from Maureen Dunn (Wife of Commander Joseph P. Dunn, MIA-China), May 28, 1984;” Folder: SP885 228757; Box 221: WHORM Subject File, SP-SPEECHES, SP885-SP889 [215036]; *Ronald Reagan Presidential Library*. Other telegrams and letters praising the president’s words regarding POW/MIAs include: “Telegram from Mr. and Mrs. Ralph Ecklund to President Reagan, May 28, 1984;” Folder: SP885 228757; Box 221: WHORM Subject File, SP-SPEECHES, SP885-SP889 [215036]; *Ronald Reagan Presidential Library*, and

for “having the courage” to pay tribute to the soldiers.⁹⁶ Another showed appreciation that Reagan went “that extra mile to help Americans once again stand tall.”⁹⁷ Veterans of the conflict expressed gratitude for the “stirring patriotic tribute for [their] Vietnam counterparts who served willingly and with great pride” and for the “administration’s untiring efforts to help heal the wounds” the war created among its participants and the American public.⁹⁸ “When you pinned the Medal of Honor on the Unknown Soldier,” wrote Sgt. Jay Toler, “I felt as though you had pinned it on me.”⁹⁹

The efforts to insert the Vietnam soldier into the same martial tradition defined by the successes of the men who fought for the country from the Revolution to World War II were now complete in the eyes of the Reagan administration. Whether its campaign changed the Vietnam Syndrome or not was irrelevant to the larger task at hand: saving

“Letter from George and Gladys Brooks to President Reagan, May 28, 1984;” Folder: SP885 228757; Box 221: WHORM Subject File, SP-SPEECHES, SP885-SP889 [215036]; *Ronald Reagan Presidential Library*. The Brooks wrote, “Your message today, erased any lingering doubts that the administration...intends to pursue to the fullest, the accounting of our missing men.”

⁹⁶“Telegram from Claire J. Barker to President Reagan, May 28, 1984;” Folder SP885 228757; Box 221: WHORM Subject File SP-SPEECHES, SP885-SP889 [215036]; *Ronald Reagan Presidential Library*. Barker was a nurse in Vietnam who said the ceremony might help her “put my nightmares to rest.”

⁹⁷ “Telegram from Robert D. Crandall to President Reagan, May 28, 1984;” Folder: SP885 228757; Box 221: WHORM Subject File, SP-SPEECHES, SP885-SP889 [215036]; *Ronald Reagan Presidential Library*.

⁹⁸ “Telegram from Ronald Bosken to President Reagan, May 28, 1984;” Folder: SP885 228757; Box 221: WHORM Subject File, SP-SPEECHES, SP885-SP889 [215036]; *Ronald Reagan Presidential Library* and “Telegram from [African-American veteran] Charles Buford to President Reagan, May 28, 1984;” Folder: SP885 228757; Box 221: WHORM Subject File, SP-SPEECHES, SP885-SP889 [215036]; *Ronald Reagan Presidential Library*. Buford also told Reagan he could now “stand proud in knowing that my country recognized our efforts.”

⁹⁹ “Telegram from Sgt. Jay Toler to President Reagan, May 29, 1984;” Folder: SP885 228757; Box 221: WHORM Subject File, SP-SPEECHES, SP885-SP889 [215036]; *Ronald Reagan Presidential Library*.

the traditions and folklore attached to successful American militarism and maintaining their role in substantiating the allegedly special nature of the United States.

The next time Reagan participated in a ceremony honoring the soldiers of Vietnam was Veterans' Day of the same year. Exactly two years after the dedication of the Wall, the statue, The Three Soldiers, meant to appease those who disliked the design of the memorial, was ready to be unveiled.¹⁰⁰

Reagan officially attended the unveiling, and although he only spoke briefly, he reiterated "the loyalty and the valor" of those who served in Vietnam and yet received little gratitude for their sacrifices.¹⁰¹ Beyond those comments, however, the speech stands as a defining moment in wiping away the previous exclusion of these men from the American military tradition.

Speaking next to the Wall, he told the audience "[t]he Memorial reflects as a mirror reflects, so that when you find the name you're searching for, you find it in your own reflection. And as you touch it, from certain angles, you're touching too, the reflection of the Washington Monument or the chair in which great Abe Lincoln sits." Their image no longer carrying the tarnish of the conflict, Reagan proclaimed to the soldier of the war "you performed with a steadfastness and valor that veterans of other

¹⁰⁰ Frederick Hart, a sculptor who vied with Lin to design the actual memorial, created the Three Soldiers. The bronze statue represents the racial composition of the war, as well as the humanity of the soldiers who served.

¹⁰¹ Ronald Reagan, "Remarks of the President At Dedication of Vietnam Memorial Statue," November 11, 1984," *The Public Papers of the President*, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library. <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1984/111184a.htm>

wars salute, and you are forever in the ranks of that special number of Americans in every generation that the nation records as true patriots.”¹⁰²

¹⁰² Ibid.

CHAPTER SIX

SAVING THE 'CITY ON A HILL': *NATIONAL REVIEW*'S CRUSADE TO RECLAIM AMERICAN EXCEPTIONALISM AFTER THE WITHDRAWAL FROM VIETNAM

Vietnam was indeed an all-American effort, and one that, some of us contend, will one day take its place in the annals of national nobility: a witness to America's disposition to endure special sacrifices in discharge of its heavy international responsibility: to contain the movement that brought death, oppression, and poverty to so many millions for so many years.

William Frank Buckley, Jr., October 28, 1992¹

In the April 1, 1991 edition of the conservative periodical *National Review*, the magazine's founder, conservative icon William F. Buckley proclaimed after the close of the Gulf War, "it is widely remarked that we have exorcised the ghost of Vietnam." He continued with the caveat, "this is true, though it must be said with a certain caution."² Despite any underlying concerns that lingered, Buckley believed the United States and its military proved themselves in a way they were unable to for decades. The America of the post-Gulf War era, he declared, could celebrate itself once again because of what he described as "the most spectacular military victory of the century."³ Mused Buckley, the outcome of the war should compel the city of New York to "repeal its ticker-tape ban."⁴

Unlike after Vietnam, the country had the right to celebrate the military's defeat of Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein, in his estimation. Of course, this success occurred with

¹William F. Buckley, "Poor Man's War," *National Review* 44, no. 4, "On the Right" column, (written October 28, 1992, published December 14, 1992) : 62.

² William F. Buckley, "Let the Joy be Unconfined," *National Review* 43, no. 5, "On the Right" column, (written March 1, 1991, published April 1, 1991), : 54.

³ Ibid. 54.

⁴ Ibid., 54.

the expertise of soldiers well aware of the stain of the earlier war, men who cut their teeth in Vietnam. They included General Norman Schwarzkopf who became one of the most popular generals in U.S. history because of his high profile and strong performance in Operation Desert Storm.⁵ Buckley approved of the abundance of accolades America and the media directed at the general, arguing “although the historical credit for our achievement goes to George Bush, the hero is the general in the field, and never was there one more satisfactory than Norman Schwarzkopf.”⁶

The leader of American conservative intellectuals Buckley also had a personal reason to celebrate. The victory against Iraq was the culmination of a long-term campaign to reestablish American military tradition and exceptionalism. The strategic and technological successes of warfare in Operation Desert Storm had all but removed the stain of Vietnam from the military, and the only real remnants of the war were concerns that future civilian meddling in military affairs could create additional quagmires. This vindication of the American armed forces was something Buckley and his editors at *National Review* struggled to achieve for almost twenty-five years. Until 1991, they had just gone about it the wrong way.

From the 1968 election of Richard Nixon during the most tumultuous year of the war through the administration of George H.W. Bush, they focused on the creation of a conservative savior who would reaffirm the strength of America and its military by leading victorious martial endeavors. But the inability of post-Vietnam Republican

⁵ A good biography of Schwarzkopf is Roger Cohen, *In the Eye of the Storm: The Life of General Norman Schwarzkopf* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1993). Schwarzkopf wrote an autobiography, as well *It Doesn't Take a Hero: The Autobiography of Norman H. Schwarzkopf* (New York: Bantam Books, 1992);

⁶ Buckley, “Let the Joy be Unconfined,” 54.

commanders-in-chief to renew the armed forces via warfare and revive the country's image of exceptionalism due to their own weaknesses proved a formidable roadblock. Frustrated from almost a quarter of a century campaign to salvage the shining city on a hill, William Buckley and the *National Review* ran with the powerful performance and quick successes of the military during Gulf War. The country's redeemer turned out to be the American military and its martial men, in their eyes, and Buckley soon proclaimed the war the epitome "of everything the American people wanted to be proud of: leadership, morale, intelligence, technology."⁷

The Intellectual Power of William F. Buckley and *National Review*

Born to his oil baron namesake in 1925, William F. Buckley lived a life of privilege. His early life consisted of private schools, residence in multiple countries, and a staunchly Catholic upbringing. After graduating from high school too young for the draft, the U.S. army finally inducted him in the summer of 1944. Buckley noted in his literary biography, *Miles Gone By* that his time in the military was "brief and bloodless," and by the fall of 1945, he began his education at Yale University.⁸

Combining his intellect, his virulent anti-communist stance inspired by his Catholicism, and his knack for writing, he created the conservative periodical *National Review* in 1955, five years after he graduated. Already known for his 1951 book *God and Man at Yale*, a scathing critique of the Ivy League institution's professors, whom he

⁷ Ibid.

⁸William F. Buckley, Jr., *Miles Gone By: A Literary Biography* (Washington, DC: Regenery Publishing, 2004), 115.

believed pushed a liberal ideology on their students, he set out to assemble a variety of conservative writers “to consolidate and mobilize the right.”⁹

Buckley succeeded in that difficult endeavor, as historian Bruce Schulman suggests, because he “managed to unite disparate factions of conservatives” concerned with moral issues and a free market economy, along with one particularly important group, “hard-line anti-communists primarily interested in the twilight struggle against the Soviets.”¹⁰ Their common goal was the empowerment of the United States through conservative ideals of tradition, virtue, and moral order.¹¹ Although “peaceful coexistence” rarely described the “relationship between the various factions at the magazine,” according to historian Niels Bjerre-Poulsen, somehow, ideologically, it worked.¹²

One of the most important men recruited by Buckley for the periodical was James Burnham: philosopher, academic, and former radical. Virulently anti-communist by the time he met the founder of *National Review*, he steadfastly believed “the only alternative to the communist World Empire is an American Empire which will be, if not literally worldwide in formal boundaries, capable of exercising world control.”¹³

⁹ Lee Edwards, *The Conservative Revolution: The Movement that Remade America* (New York: Free Press, 1999), 80.

¹⁰ Bruce J. Schulman, *The Seventies: The Great Shift in American Culture, Society, and Politics* (New York: Free Press, 2001.), 195.

¹¹ A discussion of the main tenets of American conservatism can be found in Russell Kirk, *The Politics of Prudence* (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 1993).

¹² Neils Bjerre-Poulsen, *Right Face: Organizing the American Conservative Movement, 1945-1965* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum, 2002). Discussion of peaceful coexistence, 124 and thoughts on connections, 115.

¹³ John Burnham as quoted in Neils Bjerre-Poulson, *Right Face*, 117.

Conservatives working for the magazine, particularly its editors, adhered to Burnham's belief in the U. S. Empire too, and created in *National Review* a strong medium for their opinions and those of their contingent of like-minded Republicans.¹⁴ While their "arguments were more often intellectual than pragmatic," according to historian John A. Andrew, they continued to build an audience and a solid reputation for criticizing the agenda of their ideological enemies, the liberal establishment.¹⁵ As Burnham argued, the magazine served to create "intellectual credibility" for conservatism.¹⁶

The magazine thrived while the situation in Vietnam deteriorated. The U.S. military's performance against North Vietnam and the Viet Cong threatened the basic principles and belief system of conservatives, in which "patriotic concern for the nation and its culture" was of the utmost importance, according to Buckley. The war had the potential to undermine all they believed in and what they felt the United States represented.¹⁷

¹⁴ Some of the works that defined the conservative ideology of the 1950s and 1960s include William F. Buckley, Jr., *Up from Liberalism* (New York: McDowell, Obolensky, 1959); James Burnham, *Suicide of the West: An Essay on the Meaning and Destiny of Liberalism* (New York: John Day Co., 1964); Russell Kirk, *The Conservative Mind: From Burke to Santayana* (Chicago: H Regnery Co., 1953); Frank S. Meyer, *In Defense of Freedom: A Conservative Credo* (Chicago: H. Regnery, Co., 1962); and Richard M. Weaver, *Ideas Have Consequences* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948). One of the first scholarly works on this intellectual movement was George H. Nash, *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America Since 1945* (New York: Basic Books, 1976).

¹⁵ John A. Andrew, *The Other Side of the Sixties: Young Americans for Freedom and the Rise of Conservative Politics* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1997), 14-15. *National Review* editor James Burnham wrote the quintessential book on the conservative opinion of liberalism, *The Suicide of the West: An Essay on the Meaning and Destiny of Liberalism* (New York: John Day, Co., 1964).

¹⁶ Neils Bjerre-Poulsen, *Right Face*, 135.

¹⁷ John A. Andrew, *The Other Side of the Sixties*, 16.

The editors of *National Review* held a rather flippant stance on the Vietnam War during the Kennedy years. Although they desired a strong anti-communist agenda by Kennedy and any president, it was much more important, in their eyes, for the United States to focus on the larger Cold War. Before Lyndon Johnson came to power in November 1963 and the Gulf of Tonkin incident gave Johnson the chance to use force in the region, they made few recommendations for how to proceed with the conflict.¹⁸ It was Johnson's handling of the war that caused Buckley and his editors to step up their discussion of the situation. The editors predicted a loss of the Cold War, not just Vietnam, and as historian Sandra Scanlon argues, "conservatives at *National Review* emphasized the paramount importance of U.S. military supremacy and saw Vietnam as an opportunity to forestall the communist wave of success."¹⁹

Richard Nixon: *National Review*'s Questionable Savior of American Exceptionalism

The election of Richard Nixon in 1968 gave *National Review* a precarious opportunity to start their efforts to quell the effects of Johnson's fiasco in Vietnam. However, promoting Nixon as the country's redeemer was not easy for the editors, particularly Buckley, since they merely tolerated him as a political figure, one they refused to endorse in 1960.²⁰

¹⁸ Sandra Scanlon, *The Pro-War Movement: Domestic Support for the Vietnam War and the Making of Modern American Conservatism* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2013), 31.

¹⁹ Ibid. 32.

²⁰ Jeffery Hart, *The Making of the American Conservative Mind: National Review and Its Times* (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2005), 127. A strong in-depth examination of conservative intellectuals' relationship with Nixon can be found in Sarah Mergel, *Conservative Intellectuals and Richard Nixon* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010). Mergel discusses their opinions on his candidacy on pages 11-32.

Jeffery Hart, an eventual editor for the periodical, wrote in his book, *The Making of the American Conservative Mind* that a begrudged acceptance of Nixon among the editors began during his candidacy in 1968, a result of “a gradual change . . . from paradigm, conservative politics to consensus, strategic politics.”²¹ The editors of *National Review* realized if they wanted a Republican president, they had to accept other types of conservatives into the fold to make that a reality. Regardless of their opinion of the man and any issues they might have had with his politics, he was the lesser of the evils laid in front of them by George Wallace. So, to beat Hubert Humphrey, the editors ended up endorsing Nixon in the 1968 campaign and “hoping for the best” from him in terms of policy.²²

The tenuous support Nixon had among the editors of *National Review* eroded quickly, at least internally. Surprisingly, it was not the policies of Vietnamization and its proposed withdrawal of American troops from South Vietnam that destroyed it. The president’s desire to create better relations between the United States and the communist power players of China and the Soviet Union irked many at the magazine. The main issue became his courting of Mao Zedong in the People’s Republic of China. Because of Mao’s ideology and the repression of his people, conservatives throughout the Cold War, despised the leader and supported the Republic of China (or Taiwan) instead.²³ Nixon’s trip to China in the spring of 1971 solidified this disgust, particularly for Buckley, who

²¹ Ibid., 197.

²² Ibid., 189. Lewis L. Gould, *The Election That Changed America* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1993), Michael Nelson, *Resilient America: Electing Nixon in 1968, Channeling Dissent, and Dividing Government* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2014); and Dennis D. Wainstock, *Election Year 1968: The Turning Point* (New York: Enigma Books, 2012).

²³ Lee Edwards, *The Conservative Revolution*, 168. Edwards states it was “an article of faith.”

traveled with the president as a member of the press corp.²⁴ Hart suggests the pundit found Nixon's "deference to Mao excessive and undignified."²⁵

Even though Nixon and Kissinger attempted to court the highly influential Buckley as a means to stop the bleeding with conservatives, it clearly failed.²⁶ The trip and Nixon's interaction with Mao made it clear to Buckley and the editors of the magazine that détente carried greater weight in the administration's objectives than winning the war in Vietnam. In fact, the ambiguous nature of Nixon's Southeast Asia policy was something they feared since his election; now their concerns accelerated.²⁷ Burnham warned in the spring of the following year, "For Richard Nixon, South Vietnam's survival as an independent non-Communist state has a lower priority than American withdrawal and his own re-election."²⁸

In the last years of the Nixon administration, it became evident the president could not fill the shoes picked for him by the *National Review* editors. The continued difficulties of the U.S. military, the perception created by the continued withdrawal of American troops, the impotency of the Paris Peace Accords, and the broken diplomatic

²⁴ Ibid., 169. Edwards argues, "mounting conservative disappointment with Nixon erupted into anger and spilled across the political landscape when the president announced in the Spring of 1971 that he was going to Peking." Sandra Scanlon examines this trip in relation to how it affected Nixon's relationship with other conservatives in *The Pro-War Movement*, 169-183. Historian Margaret MacMillan takes an in-depth look at this trip in *Nixon and Mao: The Week That Changed the World* (New York: Random House, 2007).

²⁵ Jeffery Hart, *The Making of the American Conservative Mind*, 205.

²⁶ Lee Edwards, *The Conservative Revolution*, 170. In the *The Pro-War Movement*, Sandra Scanlon discusses this courtship as well, 82-83 and suggest Buckley and Kissinger were good friends, 100.

²⁷ Scanlon, *The Pro-War Movement*, 86. William Rusher the publisher of *National Review* warned during the 1968 election season that Nixon was too ambiguous about his Vietnam policy.

²⁸ Jeffery Hart, *The Making of the American Conservative Mind*, 206.

promises the United States had made to the South Vietnamese government created an ideological problem for the editors.²⁹ They came to see the policy of Vietnamization as a smoke screen for Nixon's true strategy: cut and run. The White House hoped handing the prosecution of the war over the South Vietnam would "make it look as if ARVN had lost the war, not the United States," and fool Americans into forgetting about the national nightmare.³⁰ Burnham saw it for what it was "a tightrope walk," and "a much more complicated and problematic course" than anything Johnson attempted.³¹

Then, in the midst of trying to salvage Nixon's reputation, the break in at the Watergate complex occurred.³² The matter confirmed the *National Review's* suspicions of Nixon, as information came to light regarding the administration's role in the event. They found the scandal that followed humiliating to conservatives and the nation, and if their campaign to redeem the United States were to go forward, they would have to find a way to position Nixon, his administration, and their blunders as anomalies in the conservative narrative when it came to Vietnam.

²⁹ Jeffrey Kimball, *Nixon's Vietnam War* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1998) and David. F. Schmitz, *Richard Nixon and the Vietnam War: The End of the American Century* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2014). Nixon wrote his own book on the war titled *No More Vietnams* (New York: Arbor House, 1985).

³⁰ Jeffery Hart, *The Making of the American Conservative Mind*, 202.

³¹ "Suicide of the West: Accelerating," *National Review* 27, no. 13, "Editors' Remarks," (April 11, 1975) : 382.

³² George C. Herring gives a succinct overview of the policy in *America's Longest War*, 281-288. In hindsight, Secretary of State Henry Kissinger discusses the policy and exiting Vietnam in *Diplomacy* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994), 674-702. An new examination of the personal stories of the Vietnamization policy can be found in Michael A. Eggleson, *Exiting Vietnam: The Era of Vietnamization and American Withdrawal Revealed in the First-Person* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company, 2014). They essential, but non-historical work on Watergate is Carl Bernstein and Bob Woodward, *All the President's Men* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1974). A strong historical overview of the scandal is Stanley I. Kutler, *Watergate: A Brief History with Documents* (Maldon, MA: Blackwell Publishing, Ltd., 2010).

In Watergate, surprisingly, they found opportunity in the distraction it created in Washington, blaming Congress, particularly liberal Democrats for the failure of Nixon's plans for Vietnamization. *National Review* used Watergate to plug holes the nation saw in Nixon's Vietnam policy. George Will, writing after the fall of Saigon in 1975, explained how America's defeat in the "nation's longest, losingest war," actually originated with Watergate. The scandal, in his estimation, "contributed directly to the defeat of a cause in which two million Americans fought" because of the lack of resolve liberals in the American Congress had toward the conflict in Southeast Asia. He blamed them for worrying more about their partisan reaction to the president's woes, than their responsibilities to South Vietnam.³³

America's foreign policy troubles only worsened during the Watergate era, according to Will, because if the administration asked for enforcement or revocation of the Paris Peace Accords it "risk[ed] provoking" already angry congressmen.³⁴ In other words, Nixon's weak performance in the final years of the war occurred because Congress could not look past his transgressions and work with him. Burnham jumped on this bandwagon too, albeit ambiguously, when he argued just before the fall of Saigon: "it is extremely doubtful, to say the least, that the North Vietnamese would have launched

³³ George F. Will, "Nightmares, Past and at Hand," *National Review* 27, no. 19, "Capitol Issues," (May 23, 1975) : 548.

³⁴ Ibid., 548. Few scholarly works primarily focus on the negotiations and the signing of the 1973 Peace Accords or its aftermath. Some include Larry Berman, *No Peace, No Honor: Nixon, Kissinger, and Betrayal in Vietnam* (New York: Free Press, 2001) and Walter Scott Dillard, *Sixty Days to Peace: Implementing the Paris Peace Accords, Vietnam 1973* (Fort Lesley J. McNair, Washington, DC: National Defense University, 1982). A personal account of the period can be found in Henry Kissinger, *Ending the Vietnam War: A History of America's Involvement in and Extrication from the Vietnam War* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2003). Many scholars treat the subject within the broader context of the war including Stanley Karnow *Vietnam: A History* (New York, Viking Press, 1983), 582-687 and Marilyn Young, *Vietnam Wars, 1945-1990* (New York: Harper Collins, 1991), 254-299.

the present blitzkrieg if they had been obliged to face a politically unwounded, post-1972 Nixon in the White House.”³⁵

Years later, the remnants of this manufactured story still floated around with the editors and contributors to the periodical. A 1988 piece by historian and regular columnist Brian Crozier declared that the Congress of “a *defeated* superpower” destroyed Nixon’s efforts to support the South Vietnam government and military. He contended the president “pulled out of Vietnam because he could see no way of winning there,” but he “left the forsaken forces of South Vietnam the wherewithal to hold their own against the northern aggressor.” It was Congress that “frustrated his honorable intentions, starved the South of ammunition and spare parts, and condemned the Vietnamese people to the bitter choice between slavery and the hazards of rickety boats on the high seas.”³⁶

After Gerald Ford took over for the disgraced Nixon, *National Review* continued blaming the same villains for supposedly undermining the conservative commander-in-chief and the military from salvaging the U.S. position in the war.³⁷ Ford once mentioned to the press that, although he did not mean to place responsibility on anyone in particular, “there was a substantial reduction made by Congress in the amounts of military equipment requested for South Vietnam.” This statement “to the untutored ear” Will argued, “sounded a bit like an assessment of blame” for why the United States lost. When a reporter asked Ford to clarify if he believed the current turmoil in Vietnam meant

³⁵ “Suicide of the West: Accelerating,” 382.

³⁶ Brian Crozier, “The Afghan Turning Point,” *National Review* 40, no. 10, “The Protracted Conflict,” (May 27, 1988) : 26.

³⁷ See Yanek Mieczkowski, *Gerald Ford and the Challenges of the 1970s* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2005), especially 273-350. Ford published his autobiography *A Time to Heal: The Autobiography of Gerald Ford* (New York: Harper and Row) in 1979.

that “55,000 lives were wasted,” Ford claimed “the tragic sacrifices...would not have been made in vain,” if only the United States would have “carried out the solemn commitments that were made in Paris.”³⁸

Will took it upon himself to translate the intentions of the president’s words for his readers, pretending that if Ford had “said with cutting precision what he seemed inclined to say—that Congress made a mockery of 55,000 dead—the roof would have been blown off the Capitol.”³⁹ If the president would not say it with conviction, Will would in the pages of *National Review*. Congress ruined the U.S. ability to protect its ally and keep its promises, sully the efforts of Nixon to salvage the country and the military’s image.

Even Buckley turned to calling out Congress for failing to meet the promises of the Treaty of Paris and allowing for the defeat of the South. Although he knew “it was certainly a mistake of President Nixon not to have insisted that Congress...either accept or reject responsibility for enforcing the terms of the treaty,” he blamed the members of Congress who did not hold the North Vietnamese to the Accords. His disdain for them, however, read much more like an indictment of the weaknesses of liberals and others in Washington for their supposedly soft stance on communism.⁴⁰ Buckley barked, “Congress ran under the pressure of moral fatigue. I’d sooner, fighting for my life, do so

³⁸ George F. Will, “Echo Chamber,” *National Review* 27, no. 15, “Capitol Issues,” (May 25, 1975): 440.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 440.

⁴⁰ Good discussions of this understanding of liberals as soft are found in K.A. Cuordileone, *Manhood and American Political Culture in the Cold War* (New York: Routledge, 2004) and Robert D. Dean, *Imperial Brotherhood: Gender and the Making of Cold War Foreign Policy* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003).

in the company of 15 South Vietnamese soldiers, than of the 15 members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.”⁴¹

But the editors of *National Review* knew the U.S. still appeared weak, even after this elaborate blame game. This was especially true as the political situation in South Vietnam further deteriorated in the late 1970s.⁴² Burnham started to worry that pro-American nations, some holding significant communist forces internally, would retreat out of fear that they could no longer trust the United States. Indeed, he said, many within the world might “begin to conclude that the Soviet Union is a serious world power, while the United States is not.”⁴³

George Will agreed, and borrowed from British counter-insurgency expert Sir Robert Thompson’s assertion that the United States had weakened itself by surrendering rather than stopping the horrors of war.⁴⁴ Although Will did not believe the situation to be

⁴¹ William F. Buckley, “No Breast-Beating?” *National Review* 27, no. 17, “On the Right” column, (May 9, 1975) : 524.

⁴² Vietnam as a whole suffered amid political and social reforms that weakened the food supply and harmed the economy. This was coupled with the war in Cambodia and a brief war with China (leading to the exodus of ethnic Chinese). However, South Vietnam suffered additional consequences give crackdowns of political dissidents and some individuals’ connection to the Republic of South Vietnam and the United States. All of these issues created significant problems in the everyday life of Vietnamese living in the south, leading to a mass exodus from the region. A good, brief discussion of the aftermath of the Vietnam War in Vietnam can be found in Marilyn Young, *Vietnam Wars, 1945-1990* (New York: Harper Collins, 1991), 300-318. William Duiker, *Vietnam after the Fall of Saigon* (Athens, OH: Ohio University, Center for International Studies, 1980) presents the climate of Vietnam in the late 1970s and in subsequent editions in 1985 and 1989, the condition of the country in the 1980s. Gabriel Kolko’s, *Vietnam: Anatomy of a Peace* (New York: Routledge, 1997) looks at the totality of Vietnam’s attempts shape itself after the war, but a strong discussion of the complications of many reforms occurs on pages, 101-118.

⁴³ “Suicide of the West: Accelerating,” 382.

⁴⁴ Sir Robert Thompson makes this point in *Peace is Not at Hand* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1974). Thompson was a member of the Royal Armed Forces during World War II and a member of the Malayan Civil Service before and after the war. After Malayan independence, he worked as the defense secretary for the future prime minister of Malaya, Tun Abdul Razak. He became the head of the British Advisory Mission to South Vietnam (he left in 1965). Thompson criticized the use of air power against the North Vietnamese and suggested the war had to be fought on the ground and in conjunction with Vietnamese cultural understandings of warfare. The Americans ignored him until Richard Nixon asked him

irreversible, he suggested Thompson's thoughts "highlighted real trends," in U.S. foreign policy, one that clearly undermined American authority and strength.⁴⁵

Buckley, in the meantime, struggled with how to change this perception of weakness. He contemplated, "it is difficult to answer the question how to maintain one's dignity" after the loss of a war.⁴⁶ In 1977, he suggested the United States could save face and regain respect, if it focused on promoting human rights in South Vietnam.⁴⁷ He argued the nation's image could improve if it refused to cower from its supposed original motives "to give South Vietnam an opportunity to be free and independent." Doing so, the country could preserve not only its dignity, but also uplift its principles. Performing with strength in this realm would be "an affirmation of ideals that survive, or ought to survive, defeat on the battlefield."⁴⁸

Burnham did not have the same sense of confidence, however, worrying that the wounds of Vietnam would never heal, domestically or in the international community, because the country had not squared itself with the "morality of fighting in Vietnam" let alone the "moral qualms about the consequences of pulling out." In fact, "[t]he severance pay and temporary pension we gave the old girl when we parted company don't quite

to become a special advisor to his administration regarding the issue of pacification. He outlined his thoughts on counterinsurgency in *Defeating Communist Insurgency: The Lessons of Malaya and Vietnam* (New York: F.A. Praeger, 1966) and *No Exit from Vietnam* (New York: McKay, 1970).

⁴⁵ George F. Will, "Echo Chamber," 440.

⁴⁶ William F. Buckley, "Dancing in the Dark," *National Review* 29, no. 20, (May 27, 1977) : 631

⁴⁷ Buckley's discussion of human rights refers to the *Voice of Vietnamese Boat People: Nineteen Narratives of Escape and Survival*, eds. Mary Terrell Cargill and Jade Quang Hunyh (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Co., 2000), Sucheng Chan, *The Vietnamese American 1.5 Generation: Stories of War, Revolution, Flight, and New Beginnings* (Philadelphia: Temple University, 2006)

⁴⁸ William F. Buckley, "Dancing in the Dark," 631.

seem to wipe out the obligation our past behavior saddled us with,” he sarcastically noted.⁴⁹ If Americans could not figure it out, how would other countries sort through the American performance in the war and at the diplomatic table, and understand its meaning for the future of the international system.

The United States, according to Burnham, had to make major changes, if it was ever to save face, especially since the weakened state of the country’s national security and international political power was “no different from the way it looked during the decade of fighting.” Without a significant overhaul of the American image, there would be a “further loss of confidence in (and fear of) U.S. integrity and power,” while a continued lack of introspective examination of the war would sully the country’s destiny to expand first territorially, and then ideologically and economically, across the globe.⁵⁰

Ronald Reagan: *National Review*’s New Hope for the Salvation of American Exceptionalism

The hope to re-establish those traditions came with a variety of solutions from *National Review*. Burnham suggested the United States needed to “sweep up the litter” of the Vietnam War and leave the region behind, rather than continuing to subject the country to such negativity.⁵¹ However, collectively, the editors presented the same idea as Buckley that the United States should respond to a significant moral and ethical problem: the plight of Vietnamese refugees.

⁴⁹ James Burnham, “Go East Old Man,” *National Review* 27, no. 3 (January 31, 1985) : 96.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 96.

⁵¹ Ibid., 96.

In the summer of 1979, they declared, “there can be no more rock-bottom human rights issue than the right of our former allies to live, and set foot on free land.”⁵²

Although the editors probably cared little about the refugees’ experience, they believed a U.S. response held promise to salvage the country’s global image. They particularly liked the assessment of George Will that assisting the exiles could also pull the country out of the funk it had been in since the Vietnam War. He wanted to “send an armada of rescue boats *now* to save who can be saved,” arguing, “What could more elevate our national spirit than participation in a great humane enterprise? What could more lift our hearts—and evoke world admiration— than the spectacle of a flotilla of our own ships embarked on the most spacious operation of mercy ever undertaken?”⁵³ But Jimmy Carter, surprisingly, did not give any substantial humanitarian aid, and such a fantastical display of American military power never occurred.⁵⁴

Obviously, *National Review* had many more problems with the strongly liberal Democratic president than his out of character stance on Vietnam refugees, so it set its

⁵² “Hanoi’s Shame and Ours,” *National Review* 31, no. 31, “Editors’ Remarks,” (August 3, 1979) : 958.

⁵³ Ibid., 958.

⁵⁴ The height of flight from South Vietnam occurred in 1978 and 1979. Between 1975 and 1990 close to 2 million people left both North and South Vietnam. In the mass exodus of the late 1970s, the refugees originally went to various places Southeast Asia by boat. Due to the numbers of people exiting Vietnam, these countries started to hold back on accepting new refugees. Eventually, in the summer of 1979, an international agreement minimized the flow of refugees (though many continued to flee clandestinely), created temporary safe havens in Southeast Asia for those who could leave, and resettled them in Europe and North America, more than half coming to the United States. Carter empathized with the plight of the South Vietnamese “boat people.” In the summer of 1979, he told the American public that these individuals were our allies and they are “philosophically attuned to us” rather than to the communist who had taken over the country. Bill Peterson, “President Makes Appeal for Asian Boat People,” *Washington Post*, August 23, 1979. This statement came in response to Americans dislike of the “influx” of Vietnamese refugees. Carter, though taken to task by *National Review*, ordered the Seventh Fleet of the Navy to the South China Sea to rescue any refugees found in the water in July 1979, albeit after the international agreement. “500 Boat People Reach Safety As Vietnamese Exodus Picks Up,” *Washington Post*, September 15, 1979.

sights on the next presidential election. The prospect of a new American leader, a conservative who could do a better job at elevating the nation brought back into focus the editors' previous plans for finding a national savior.

While president of the Citadel, former Navy Vice Admiral James Stockdale wrote about Ronald Reagan's potential to redeem the country. Like most conservatives, Stockdale, worried that "public confidence in our defense establishment" continued to erode during the Carter administration, comparing it to "five years of inept executive leadership" under Lyndon Johnson.⁵⁵

Stockdale was unsure if Reagan could reclaim the reins of defense policy from "a self-serving cult" of liberal Democrats who refused to listen to Americans "tired of apologizing" for their nation and her supposed weakness. But he hoped the former governor could correct the country's negative image and focus on traditional issues of "honor and idealism."⁵⁶

Reagan seemed to deliver what Stockdale and the editors of *National Review* wanted, at least with his rhetoric. A week after the publication of Stockdale's optimistic article, the future president accepted his party's nomination. In his acceptance speech, he made a promise to redeem the country, declaring "I will not stand by and watch this great country destroy itself under mediocre leadership that drifts from one crisis to the next,

⁵⁵ James Stockdale, "Toward Honor or Efficiency," *National Review* 33, no. 13 (July 10, 1981) : 771-772. A strong discussion of the purported "malaise" of the Carter years can be found in Kevin Mattson, *What the Heck Are You Up to, Mr. President?: Jimmy Carter, America's 'Malaise,' and the Speech That Should Have Changed the Country* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2009); Michael Schaller and George Rising, *The Republican Ascendancy: American Politics, 1968-2001*, American History Series (Wheeling, IL: Harlan Davidson, 2002), 54-82; and Bruce J. Shulman, *The Seventies: The Great Shift in American, Culture, Society, and Politics*, (New York: Free Press, 2001), 121-143.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 773.

eroding our national will and purpose . . . the American people deserve better from those to whom they entrust our nation's highest offices.”⁵⁷

The *National Review* and Reagan already had a rather strong relationship, particularly due to the ideological and personal bonds between him and Buckley. Jeffery Hart, who worked on Reagan’s short-lived 1968 presidential campaign, described how “Reagan was an assiduous reader of *National Review*, had a particularly high regard for Burnham’s prudential and realistic foreign policy, [and] was a friend of Buckley.”⁵⁸ His support of the magazine as president included appearances at the editors’ galas for the establishment of the Washington bureau and their thirtieth anniversary, an indication of the extent and importance of their association. They, he suggested, along with other conservatives, saw the 1980 election and Reagan’s leadership as “a culmination” in the rise of American conservatism.⁵⁹

Although the editors of *National Review* believed Reagan one of the main leaders of American conservatism, his foreign policy in the Third World, particularly Central America, presented significant roadblocks for his supposed role as the country’s redeemer in the post-Vietnam era.⁶⁰ During his eight-year tenure as president, the

⁵⁷ Ronald Reagan, "Address Accepting the Presidential Nomination at the Republican National Convention in Detroit," July 17, 1980, *The American Presidency Project*, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=25970>.

⁵⁸ Jeffery Hart, *The Making of the American Conservative Mind*, 260

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 260-261.

⁶⁰ An excellent primer on United States and Latin American foreign relations is Kyle Longley, *In the Eagle’s Shadow: The United States and Latin America*, second edition (Wheeling, IL: Harlan Davidson, 2009). Longley discusses Carter and Reagan’s relationships with Latin America (with a significant emphasis on Central America) on pages 280-324. Other book focused on US/Latin American relations in this period include Thomas Carothers, *In the Name of Democracy: U.S. Policy Toward Latin America in the Reagan Years* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991) and William LeoGrande, *Our Own*

editors' high hopes that he would re-bolster the country's powerful image dwindled, even as Reagan waged his own campaign to shore up the United States' martial tradition. The administration's lack of intervention in the region militarily made it clear to those at *National Review* that its decision-making echoed the Vietnam Syndrome and maintained the country's weak image.

Reagan's response to civil war in El Salvador was the first major foreign policy criticized by *National Review*.⁶¹ They argued the Salvadoran Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN), a group made up of organizations with varying political ideologies working to defeat the country's military junta, had multiple attributes similar to the North Vietnamese and Vietcong, the least of which being its communist ties.⁶² The administration, however, worried any correlation would destroy American support for intervention, and therefore worked hard to deflect any discussion regarding real or imagined similarities. The editors saw this as a shortsighted tactic doomed to Vietnam-like failure because inattention to the truth about the FMLN would allow it the same chance to lure the United States into another quagmire in the "jungle."⁶³

Backyard: The United States in Central America, 1977-1992 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998).

⁶¹ A discussion of the politics and events surrounding the Civil War in El Salvador can be found in Cynthia McClintock, *Revolutionary Movements in Latin America: El Salvador's FMLN and Peru's Shining Path* (Washington, DC: Institute of Peace Press, 1998). Walter LaFeber examines the United States' role in the El Salvador Civil War in *Inevitable Revolutions: The United States in Central America* (New York: Norton, 1983), as does Mark Danner, *The Massacre at El Mozote* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994).

⁶² A strong discussion of the actual nature of the FMLN and others who practiced guerilla warfare in Latin America is found in Dirk Kruijt, *Guerillas: War and Peace in Central America* (London: Zed Books, 2008).

⁶³ "El Salvador: Mini-Vietnam?," *National Review* 34, no. 6 (April 2, 1982) : 338.

American military intervention in El Salvador never came to fruition, while conflict there and throughout the region raged in the 1980s. The supposed weakness of Reagan's response to Central American turmoil raised the editors' fears that his actions (or reactions) in the region had minimal desired effect both in terms of foreign policy and American regeneration.

To them, it appeared as though Reagan and his advisors made many of the same errors as their predecessors during the Vietnam era. Their greatest concern was the president's failure to convey to the American public why stability in the region served the country's best interests, an issue that echoed Vietnam. The president, they argued as early as 1982, "has not laid the political groundwork for a serious assertion of U.S. interest," and therefore, the "public has no clear conception of that interest as it applies to Central America."⁶⁴

The shining moment of Reagan's foreign policy in Central America was October 1983's Operation URGENT FURY, in which American Marines and Special Forces invaded the Caribbean island of Grenada. Taken over by socialist revolutionaries with close ties to Fidel Castro just a few months earlier, the instability of the small country served as a reminder of Soviet influence in the United States' backyard. Under the guise that American citizens studying at Grenada's medical school were in danger, Reagan and his military advisors quickly planned the invasion. Within six days of the operation's

⁶⁴ Ibid. 338.

commencement, U.S. forces removed the socialist government, albeit with significant planning and coordination issues among the military forces.⁶⁵

Surprisingly, *National Review* focused little on the issues leading up to the invasion or on its success. In September of 1982, the editors published an article by Trinidadian lawyer Keith Charles that outlined Cuban and Soviet influence on Grenada. Charles did not believe that the United States would send in troops and that the small Caribbean island would continue its role as a Cuban satellite.⁶⁶ That, however, was the extent of a pre-invasion discussion.

It was only after the offensive took place that any of the editors weighed in on the subject. Simply suggesting that the move was the right one to take, even though many objected, William Buckley had little to say about the Reagan administration's accomplishment. He expressed pleasure because the United States "rescued a little island in the Caribbean from a monstrous tyranny whose script was being written in Moscow and Havana," but otherwise, he did little to praise the White House administration.⁶⁷

He did commend U.S. ambassador to the United Nations Jeane Kirkpatrick on her role in defending the action to the world and announced to his readers "whatever the complexion of the White House, it is capable of decisive action." But this was insincere praise for an administration Buckley and his editors believed was unable to make the

⁶⁵ Edgar F. Raines presents a strong examination of Operation: URGENT FURY from the perspective of the American military in *The Rucksack War: U.S. Army Operational Logistics in Grenada, 1983* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, United States Army, 2010).

⁶⁶ Keith Charles, "The Castroization of Grenada," *National Review* 34, no. 18 (September 17, 1982): 1150.

⁶⁷ William F. Buckley, "Missing the Point of Grenada," *National Review* 35, no. 23 (November 25, 1983): 1504

decisions necessary to curb the effects of Vietnam.⁶⁸ The invasion of Grenada, to the editors, was insignificant more than likely because of its severely limited nature and its disclosure of continued military disorganization.

Throughout the 1980s, the expectation of the editors was for Reagan to act as the nation's savior from a perceived weakness in its traditions, rather than behaving in a way that highlighted it. As a result, unlike him and other conservatives, *National Review* refused a significant emphasis on changing the public's understandings of the Vietnam War. This reasoning likely was due to fear of re-drawing attention to the negative aspects of the war that damaged the country's image and traditions and keeping them in the public's consciousness. Buckley explained this away when discussing why the magazine declined to commemorate the tenth anniversary of the war's end, unlike many mainstream periodicals such as *Time* and *Newsweek*. He claimed memorialization would make the war into something it was not and would gloss over the real and thorny issues of the loss.⁶⁹

Even with this attitude, the magazine became a part of the controversy over the design of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. In late 1981, the publication of the editors' note "Stop that Monument," a short, but extremely negative opinion piece on Maya Lin's concept for the memorial, set off a firestorm and marked a curious episode in the history of *National Review*. The editors deemed the buried, black granite design created by the young artist an embarrassment that had a "clear political message" against the war. They

⁶⁸ William F. Buckley, "Grenada Talk," *National Review* 35, no. 23 (November 25, 1983): 1505.

⁶⁹ Buckley, "On Anniversaries," 54.

demanding the Reagan administration halt the project and begin the process of replacing the design “with suitable sculpture.”⁷⁰

Their position seemed to be in line with James Webb and Tom Carhart, adding credence to their dispute with the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund (VVMF). But just two months later, the magazine made an about face and published an article by Norman B. Hannah asserting that the editors had made a “premature evaluation” of a war memorial that in actuality would “be beautiful, imposing, and fitting.” In a meeting with Maya Lin about the design, he came to see the design as a piece of “austere, principled simplicity” that honored those who served and did not highlight controversial aspects of war. He dubbed it “the open book memorial” through which the United States faced its history, mistakes and all, and would proudly display Americans’ “respect for truth and history.”⁷¹

National Review never questioned the memorial’s design again, in accordance with Buckley’s wishes to examine the war and its lessons, rather than commemorating it. When the dedication of the Wall occurred, the editors only briefly readdressed the issue by dismissing the assertions of Webb and Carhart that the memorial was a “V-shaped slab of black granite,” and lauding the now tangible monument for conveying to its viewer “considerable power and even eloquence.” The “high-gloss surface on which both the Lincoln Memorial and the Washington Monument reflect,” they suggested, presented

⁷⁰ “Stop That Monument,” *National Review* 33, no. 18 (September 18, 1981): 1064

⁷¹ Norman B. Hannah, “The Open Book Memorial,” *National Review* 33, no. 24 (December 11, 1981): 1476.

“some of the ideals for which the men fought and died.”⁷² If the Wall had any real value, to them it was, as John McLaughlin suggested in 1986, that the country finally accepted the past and had moved toward a “patriotic surge” for the first time in a long while.⁷³

McLaughlin also suggested that the popularity of the Wall illustrated “the nation’s burgeoning love affair with the military.”⁷⁴ Even so, that romance did not extend to support for Reagan’s foreign policy in Central America, not among the public or the editors of *National Review*. In fact, El Salvador turned out to be the least of the problems encountered by the Reagan administration in relation to the ghosts of Vietnam. In 1979, the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) overthrew the dictatorship of the Somoza family in Nicaragua. The socialist leanings of Nicaragua’s new leaders and their ties to Fidel Castro alarmed virulently anti-communist American conservatives. Soviet support of the new government and its leader, Daniel Ortega, terrified them and gave them a new crusade.⁷⁵

Multiple and diverse groups within Nicaragua opposed the Sandinista government, uniting to form the *Contras*. Since the group sought to overthrow the new government, it quickly gained the support of the Reagan administration. To the editors of

⁷² “That Vietnam Monument,” *National Review* 34, no. 23, “Editors’ Remarks,” (November 26, 1982) : 1461.

⁷³ John McLaughlin, “Military Love Affair,” *National Review* 38, no. 20, (October 24, 1986) : 24.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁷⁵ Good examinations of the conflict in Nicaragua include Stephen Kinzer, *Blood Brothers: Life and War in Nicaragua* (Cambridge, MA: David Rockefeller Center on Latin American Studies, Harvard University, 2007) and E. Bradford Burns, *At War in Nicaragua: The Reagan Doctrine and the Politics of Nostalgia* (1987).

National Review the country and its current turmoil served as a possible location for Ronald Reagan to prove America's mettle.

Many conservatives, including the magazine's editors, believed the American public had the ability to see Central America as "vital" to U.S. interests in a way they never saw Southeast Asia, making it possible for them to support anti-communist efforts in the region with the proper coaching. It is "ten times closer to U.S. borders than Vietnam and bound infinitely closer by history, culture, and trade," they wrote in early 1985, making any communist activity in the area of utmost importance. Nicaragua, they claimed, had the power to create "a full-fledged Marxist-Leninist state closely allied with Cuba and the USSR," and therefore was the place for a strong stance by the Reagan administration. To them, the world's perception of the United States hinged on how the White House dealt with the situation.⁷⁶

The editors, Buckley in particular, felt Reagan should stop short of major American military intervention in Nicaragua because neither Congress nor the American public would support using force to overthrow the *Sandinistas*.⁷⁷ But, they did condone strong military support and assistance to the *Contras*, as well as seeking diplomatic solutions in the international community, in order to overthrow the Sandinistas and, in turn, bolster the United States' image. They knew their strategy, one that Reagan followed to some extent, might necessitate "some use of force," but the point was to place the burden on "Nicaraguans to fight for their country's freedom, not American

⁷⁶ "Dealing with Nicaragua" *National Review* 37, no. 5, "Editors' Remarks," (March 22, 1985) : 17.

⁷⁷ Numerous polls during the 1980s indicated that "Americans are worried about U.S. involvement in a remote jungle war in Central America," David Hoffman, "Public Skeptical of Contra Aid, Spending increase for Pentagon," *Washington Post*, March 16, 1986.

troops” and prove to the American public and the world that post-Vietnam America had what it takes to resolve foreign matters.⁷⁸

Buckley considered the administration’s inability to destroy the *Sandinistas* and resolve the threat of another strong communist state in America’s backyard a disappointment. It reminded him of the same mismanagement that he criticized during the Vietnam War, which he suggested, made the government and its military advisors look weak and inept. He and his editors felt they now found themselves in a situation eerily similar to the one they endured with Nixon. Reagan’s rhetorical work to restrengthen American military tradition may have changed perceptions about the Vietnam era and its participants, but when it came to shoring up the government and the military’s abilities to act aggressively on the country’s ideals, he failed miserably in their eyes.

As Reagan’s second term continued, *National Review* continued to fear that his lack of strong action in Central America would make him a failure in the foreign policy realm. In hindsight, the rapid decline of communism and the Soviet Union from 1989-1991 would prevent that from happening. But as for the desire for him to be the savior of American exceptionalism and its inherent military tradition, their fear was not unfounded.

Buckley cried to his readers “anyone who wants to use Vietnam as an appropriate metaphor to describe our involvement in Nicaragua can justly do so.” He believed Reagan, like Vietnam-era presidents, made promises he did not keep and kept the public in the dark regarding his objectives in Central America, goals that were, according to

⁷⁸ Ibid., 17.

Buckley, directly important to them.⁷⁹ He stressed to the administration that the way to make intervention in Nicaragua palatable to the American public and something they knew directly affected them was to appeal to their basic understanding of the country's ideals and strategic concerns. However, Reagan still had yet to tell them it was "a U.S. responsibility to see to it that the *Sandinistas* do not succeed in the way that Castro succeeded in Cuba."⁸⁰

Transparency was not the Reagan administration's strong suit, though. Much like Watergate, the Iran-Contra scandal, which revealed secret sales of arms to Iran for money to fund the *Contras*, embarrassed conservatives and somewhat sullied Reagan's reputation. Buckley found the White House's clandestine efforts to fund the counter-revolutionaries inane, but not criminal, unlike his opinion of Nixon's behaviors. "The worst that can be said of Mr. Reagan," his long-time friend defended, "is that he stood by acquiescently when a sum of money was delivered to the *Contras* so that they could buy arms that Congress was to give them a few months later."⁸¹

Yet, the administration's actions left Buckley and his editors infuriated and questioning why the administration "chose...a clandestine route, which was flawed both politically and strategically." They tried to defend Reagan, arguing that a "paralytic Congress and a McGovernized Democratic Party" prevented him from competing with

⁷⁹ William F. Buckley, Jr., "Nicaragua, Another Vietnam," *National Review* 38, no. 6, (April 11, 1986) : 63.

⁸⁰ William F. Buckley, Jr., "Caution: Disillusion Ahead," *National Review* 38, no. 6, (Written July 4, 1986, Published August 1, 1986) : 63.

⁸¹ William F. Buckley, Jr., "Blood Lust," *National Review* 38, no. 25, (Written December 5, 1986, Published December 12, 1986) : 63.

the \$2 billion investment made in the region by the Soviet Union, but they knew it was a moot point.⁸²

The scandal closed the door to using Central America to flex the country's muscles and forced them to abandon Reagan as the redeemer of the country's exceptional nature. Reagan's performance in Central America, though tempered later by successes in foreign relations with the USSR, made it clear *National Review* needed to find another avenue for shoring up the United States and its traditions.

The American Military of the Gulf War: *National Review's* Savior of Exceptionalism

When George H.W. Bush became the commander-in-chief of the United States, *National Review* continued, albeit cautiously, its campaign to liberate the United States from the effects of the Vietnam War. The new president held very similar opinions to the magazine's editors regarding Vietnam's damage to the country's strength. He clearly saw this as a problem that still needed solving and moved to do so in his inaugural speech. "That war cleaves us still," Bush lamented, "but, friends, that war began in earnest a quarter of a century ago; and surely the statute of limitations has been reached. This is a fact: The final lesson of Vietnam is that no great nation can long afford to be sundered by a memory."⁸³

Twice during the Bush administration, the White House took the opportunity given by international events to try to exorcise the ghosts of Vietnam. The difference

⁸² "Nicaragua Dilemma," *National Review* 39, no. 24, "Editors Remarks," (December 18, 1987) : 17-18.

⁸³ George H. W. Bush, "Inaugural Address, January 20, 1989," *The Miller Center: University of Virginia*, <http://millercenter.org/president/speeches/detail/3419>.

between this administration and Reagan's was how it used the military to eliminate them. The first chance occurred in December of 1989, when Bush chose to invade Panama in a campaign to depose dictator and drug lord Manuel Noriega. Previously, Ronald Reagan used sanctions against the despot after collaborating with his government for many years, but Bush and his military advisors chose a very different strategy that gave the American military a much needed boost.

Operation "Just Cause" lasted approximately five days. It ended with the removal of Noriega and the installation of a new president. The editors of *National Review* quickly ran an article lauding the "post-Vietnam military" that produced this quick and relatively painless victory for the United States. Recognizing the value of the event for their cause, they challenged their readers to see this as a new American military disconnected from that of the Vietnam War. "The overwhelming majority of the soldiers involved," they stressed, "joined up after helicopters plucked the last Americans off the embassy rooftop in Saigon."⁸⁴

Bush's predecessor deserved some of the credit for the victory because of his role in rebuilding the armed forces, they suggested, but so did the Goldwater-Nichols Defense Reorganization Act that resolved some of the military's issues with the defense establishment during Vietnam, namely it streamlined command.⁸⁵ Both were key factors

⁸⁴ "Just Cause: How Well Did We Do?," *National Review* 42, no. 1, "Editors' Remarks," (January 22, 1990) : 14

⁸⁵ The Goldwater-Nichols Defense Reorganization of 1986 created a joint nature to military operations and changed the chain of command in them as well. The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff became the main military advisor to the president and was given a direct line to commander-in-chief. The chain of high command now started at theater commanders, moved to the Chairman of the JCS, and then moved to the president. The hope was to create better communication lines, to have less confusing military organization and operations, and to give the main military leader the power to carry out that role. This last

in the Panama victory, according to the editors, creating a stronger post-Vietnam armed forces the deemed “the Reagan military: smart volunteers, amply equipped...confident of popular support at home, and infused with the high morale born of hard, expensive training.”⁸⁶

Although the editors saw this victory as a step forward, the achievements in Panama, used by some to declare the Vietnam Syndrome dead, were not enough for them to see the effects of Vietnam as finally over. Yes, the short duration, the “mercifully light” casualties, and the victorious result worked wonders to alter ideas about America’s military prowess. But, a highly ideal scenario for victory marred the operation’s ability to fully show off the strength of the armed forces, with fifty percent of the troops participating already stationed in the region. The editors warned, “one hopes that the victory celebrations will be tempered with awareness that they met a relatively easy test” in an operation that also highlighted “artificial jointness, an initial failure of the changes in the command system, and . . . significant strategic lapses.”⁸⁷

The better chance for full redemption came in the summer of 1990, when Saddam Hussein’s army invaded Kuwait. From the start of tensions with Iraq, the magazine worried American military intervention could have two effects. On one hand, it could help further break down the American perceptions about the war and its long-term consequences, or on the other hand, it could reinforce those issues. The editors warned Bush if he remained “obsessed” with building an international coalition against Hussein

element was meant to decrease civilian power in military affairs that came about after the National Security Act of 1947 and that created major operational issues in the Vietnam War.

⁸⁶ Just Cause: How Well Did We Do?,” 14.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 14.

and did not take a stand quickly, the result could be devastating and reminiscent of Vietnam to Americans.⁸⁸

They also believed continued focus on diplomatic means like the Geneva Peace Conference in early January of 1991 undermined the White House's ability to demonstrate the military's and the country's strength. By "continually postponing action, we risk losing our allies, our principles, and our opportunity," they argued. At first, they blamed the military, and the "doctrinal preferences" of Colin Powell, Norman Schwarzkopf, and the U.S. Army for their adherence to the Weinberger/Powell Doctrine and its prohibition of military action without full mobilization and significant public support.⁸⁹

National Security Advisor Brent Scowcroft recalled a few years after the end of the war that he and the president believed the editors were right. The Vietnam conflict still made many in the upper-ranks of the military skittish about moving too fast and "some among our military were less than enthusiastic about the prospect" of war. The problem for Bush was that he "did not want to appear to be second-guessing the military

⁸⁸ "Going Gulfing," *National Review* 42, no. 22, "Editors' Remarks," (November 19, 1990) : 15. This international coalition consisted of 34 countries including the United States, United Kingdom, France, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Turkey, Syria, and Czechoslovakia.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 14-15. The Weinberger/Powell Doctrine, also known as the Powell Doctrine, has seven prerequisites that must be met for the commitment of the American armed forces in military conflict. Reagan Secretary of Defense Casper Weinberger created the first five requirements, while George H.W. Bush's Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Colin Powell added the sixth requirement. The first five 1) The nation or its allies vital interests must be at stake. 2) The commitment of U.S. forces must be made without reservation and must include a clear strategy for victory. 3) All political and military objectives must be clearly defined and American forces must be given all resources necessary to meet these objectives. 4) A reassessment of needs and objectives must occur on a regular basis in order to maintain the proper levels of force. 5) The U.S. Congress and the American public must strongly support the use of forces for these objectives. 6) The use of military force must be used reserved as the final decision after diplomacy has failed. A good examination of the Weinberger Doctrine during the Reagan years can be found in Gail E. S. Yoshitani, *Reagan on War: A Reappraisal of the Weinberger Doctrine, 1980-1984* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2011).

experts. Still vivid in his mind was the image of Lyndon Johnson during Vietnam, hunched over aerial charts selecting individual targets for airstrikes.”⁹⁰

William Buckley was more worried about how this slow decision-making process made the country look sluggish and reminded people of Johnson’s indecisiveness more than his micromanaging. He admonished Bush for not going in quickly and taking advantage of the ever-important early support of the public, even if that support was not as much as the military desired, arguing, “if Mr. Bush had struck Iraq on or about Labor Day, the probability is high that he’d have had the near-universal backing of the American people.”⁹¹

They believed Bush would “fight if he must,” but the editors became concerned that the stationing of a large number of troops in the Gulf was less about military preparedness and more about wanting “to scare Saddam out of Kuwait without having to fight,” for fear it would become another Vietnam. A military buildup, when used to cover hesitation to make a move, they felt, would simply give Hussein more time to prepare and indicated weakness on the part of the United States.⁹² This affliction of “short war psychosis,” the belief that the country still could not “tolerate a long war” had to stop.

All of these problems combined in the mind of the editors to make American operations in the Persian Gulf a possible recipe for disaster. They immediately presented a prescription for war. If the administration stopped worrying about another Vietnam, did not bend to politics or military dogma, and stopped leaving the American public in the

⁹⁰George Bush and Brent Scowcroft, *A World Transformed* (New York: Knopf, 1998), 466.

⁹¹ William F. Buckley, Jr., “Wartime?,” *National Review* 42, no. 23, (Written on October 31, 1990, Published on December 3, 1990) : 62.

⁹² “The Waiting Game,” *National Review* 42, no.23, “Editors’ Remarks,” (December 3, 1990) : 15.

dark about its objectives; the United States would swiftly achieve its goal of driving Hussein out of Kuwait.⁹³

Buckley especially resented that the administration could not let go of their fears of another Vietnam, because, in reality, the situation was “as night to day” when compared to Southeast Asia in the 1960s, and it could make all the difference in redeeming America. The terrain differed and Iraq lacked support from nations like China and the Soviet Union in Vietnam, but most importantly new technological advances improved prospects. He trusted that new military technology perfected in the last 20 years, especially in terms of airpower, made this war winnable. This prospect more than any other aspects of the war could help sweep up the remnants of the Vietnam Syndrome, if only the Bush Administration and the country’s military leaders would just act.⁹⁴

As the January 15, 1991 U.N. deadline for Hussein to leave Kuwait loomed, *National Review* called in Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs and Iran-Contra player, Elliott Abrams, to reflect on the president’s progress. Abrams had little problem with Bush’s decision making in the Persian Gulf, as he felt the president displayed “an instinctive grasp of international politics . . . particularly of the need for American firmness and leadership at a time of great change and uncertainty.”⁹⁵ However, much like the editors, he found Bush’s concern over public approval astounding. In a

⁹³ Ibid., 15.

⁹⁴ William F. Buckley, Jr., “Vietnam and Desert Storm,” *National Review* 43, no. 3, (February 25, 1991), 62-63.

⁹⁵ Elliot Abrams, “Making the Case,” *National Review* 42, no.25, (December 31, 1990) : 35.

“classic case of a bad move dictated by domestic politics,” he saw the president as squandering the support he already had.⁹⁶

Their last plea for a declaration of war came as they warned “open-ended negotiations,” between U.S. Secretary of State James Baker and Iraq’s foreign minister Tariq Aziz could become “endless, ambiguous, with no incentive for resolution,” just like Vietnam. The only real solution for Bush, they declared, was war, and he “should not shirk from waging it.”⁹⁷

After Saddam Hussein refused to withdraw his troops from Kuwait, the international coalition led by the United States commenced the Gulf War on January 16, 1991. For over a month, the coalition forces bombarded Baghdad and strategic military targets from the air, embarking on a ground war in late February. The last of the Iraqi troops in Kuwait retreated before March 1.

The editors professed during this period that they stood by their earlier criticisms, but they acknowledged, “since all of them were in a hypothetical mode...we now sweep them, practically, into the desk drawer.” The time had come to support Bush fully in his endeavors and to make their readers see they had faith in him as a commander-in-chief. With hopes high for a successful outcome, they declared Bush’s “instincts were right. And his vision was clear. He has earned the country’s and the world’s, gratitude.”⁹⁸

This shift benefitted them when hostilities ended in the Persian Gulf War, and as they reimagined what the war meant for their decades long desire to reestablish

⁹⁶ Ibid., 35-36.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 14-15.

⁹⁸ “Into Battle,” *National Review* 43, no.2, “Editors’ Remarks,” (February 11, 1991) : 13-15.

America's exceptional nature. The military and the commander-in-chief's performance displayed a reassertion of American strength and martial superiority. Very different from the end of Vietnam, Norman Schwarzkopf and Colin Powell became modern military heroes, while military personnel returned home to parades and slaps on the back.

For *National Review*, Bush's war and its focus on American technological dominance did what Nixon's handling of Vietnam and Reagan's often impotent Central American foreign policy could not accomplish. The editors saw American pride in its military restored, particularly in relation to its active service members and veterans, but they correctly divined that the public's fear of long-drawn out wars would remain, rearing its head in 2002, when George W. Bush began his own campaign against Hussein.

Contributor William Bennett remarked in his article, "The Rebirth of a Nation," published just after the war, that the win would "put...doubts to rest" about the strength of the United States and its military. He also thought it held great promise to "replace Vietnam as one of the defining events in the American psyche."⁹⁹ Although he was right that the Gulf War would help the military's image with a major victory in its column and newfound confidence, he made a much more compelling argument that "the big winner" of the Persian Gulf War was the U.S. military.¹⁰⁰

As Buckley would say just over a year later, Vietnam might "one day take its place in the annals of national nobility," but for now, it still resided in America's stream

⁹⁹ William Bennett, "Rebirth of a Nation," *National Review* 43, no. 4, (May 18, 1991) : 41.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 42. A *Newsweek* poll published on March 11, 1991 illustrated a 20% jump in confidence in the military over 1990. It also illustrates a 38% jump between 1981 and 1991. Tom Morganthau, Douglas Waller, Bill Turque, Ginny Carroll, and Andrew Murr, "The Military's New Image," *Newsweek*, March 11, 1991.

of consciousness, as well as that of the world.¹⁰¹ What changed through the Gulf War were not American understandings of the Vietnam War; it was American and world perceptions about the U.S. military and its traditions. The *National Review*'s campaign reached its completion in 1991. The elimination of "the ghosts of Vietnam" through the flexing of martial muscle raised from the graveyard the folklore of American dominance and its role in U.S. exceptionalism in a way that conservative politicians could not realize.

¹⁰¹ William F. Buckley, Jr., "Poor Man's War," 62.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

On July 6, 1987, *Newsweek* released an Independence Day related special edition dedicated to everyday American heroes. Vietnam veterans, those whose names appear on the Vietnam Wall, as well as those who paid tribute to their fallen comrades by visiting and leaving mementos at the monument, received recognition. The editors focused heavily on how “58,132 of them died, some bravely, some just unluckily, all in the service of their country,” men who “became an abstraction to all but their buddies and their loved ones, one more statistic in the debate over the justice of the war.” They noted, “it is only lately that we have given them back their names, etched on a wall of black granite on a handsome green in Washington. Their memorial has become a national shrine, a place of pilgrims and offerings, and votive candles in the night.”¹

The article, “Heroes, Past and Present,” admonished the American people for their earlier behavior toward these men noting, “In the time of Vietnam, we had heroes and didn't see them.” The magazine’s discussion of Vietnam veterans underscores both the climate to which they returned home and their acceptance by the American people as the 1980s closed. In the eyes of *Newsweek*’s editors, they deserved a place among America’s heroes.²

The location of these men, both living and dead, within the discussion of conventional heroism illustrated that the American public now accepted them as a part of

¹ “Heroes, Past and Present,” *Newsweek*, July 6, 1987.

² Ibid.

the country's military tradition, a concept in which the act of serving now defined what it meant to be a martial man, rather than the traditional act of martial victory. This change reflected years of work by veterans, politicians, journalists, writers, Hollywood directors, and the families of the fallen to change the image of the men who fought in Southeast Asia, work that both intentionally and unintentionally altered the definitions of martial masculinity, the martial tradition, and American exceptionalism.

The efforts of this eclectic group of people paved the long road to the realization that, regardless of their lack of martial success, Vietnam veterans had performed their societally prescribed duty. The conservatives who played a role in these changes receive very little representation in the historiography. Perhaps, since they believe conservatives worked to reframe the Vietnam War as a "noble cause" and to refashion the images of its veterans to pave the way for future, unencumbered military intervention, or perhaps because that attempt clearly failed, many historians see conservatives as an unimportant part of the topic.

However, as this dissertation illustrates, not all conservatives who worked to change American perceptions of the Vietnam War or its veterans did so to breakdown the Vietnam Syndrome. In fact, few made this their ultimate aim. More often than not, their main common goal was to revive the martial tradition after the Vietnam War in order to save their own reputations, their ideology's tenets, the military establishment, and the notion of America's special nature. They each picked a unique element of the martial tradition on which to rest this revival, one that often played to their perceived personal strengths.

Their campaigns, when coupled with the efforts of non-conservative Americans during the 1970s and 1980s to change social and cultural understandings of Vietnam veterans, contributed to the redefinition of martial manhood, martial tradition, and the notion of American exceptionalism. It was their determination to change how Americans viewed the war and the use of military force that failed, miserably.

The argument that the Vietnam Syndrome, or fears of another military quagmire, died with the American victory in the Middle East in 1991 fizzled during the Clinton administration, when the president's decisions regarding the possibility of intervention in the Balkans, Africa, or the Middle East often reflected fear of another Vietnam.³ In the twenty-first century, some within the American government and many within the populace had the same reaction after George W. Bush announced his desires to rid the world of the threats presented by the supposed "axis of evil" of Iran, Iraq, and North Korea.⁴

Bush's choice to enter into the Iraq War led to comparisons to Vietnam immediately in the press.⁵ Many who protested the war rallied against Bush, but after

³ Historian George C. Herring suggests of this period, "Despite an overwhelming victory in the Gulf War, bitter memories of the Vietnam debacle continued to haunt the nation two decades after its end," *From Colony to Superpower: U.S. Foreign Relations Since 1776* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 921. Good overviews of the Clinton presidency and its foreign policy are found in David Halberstam, *War in a Time of Peace: Bush, Clinton and the Generals* (New York: Scribner, 2001); George C. Herring, *From Colony to Superpower*, 925-938, and James M. McCormack, "Clinton and Foreign Policy: Some Legacies for a New Century," in ed. Steven Schier, *The Post-Modern Presidency: Bill Clinton's Legacy in U.S. Politics* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2000) 60-84.

⁴ George W. Bush, "Address Before a Joint Session of Congress on the State of the Union, January 29, 2002," Gerhard Peters and John T Wolley, *The American Presidency Project*, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=29644>.

⁵ A strong overview of the foreign policy of the George W. Bush administration appears in George C. Herring, *From Colony to Superpower*, 938-961. Examinations of the Iraq War include John W. Dower, *Cultures of War: Pearl Harbor, Hiroshima, 9-11, Iraq* (New York: W.W. Norton: New Press, 2010), and

their efforts failed and just months into the war, the comparisons and protests continued.⁶ One reporter suggested, “parts of the current debate seem to be almost as much about Vietnam as about Iraq.”⁷ Vietnam veterans’ personal stories began showing up in the news again, and in the *New York Times* a story appeared about how a trip to Vietnam revealed why the United States needed to stay the course in Iraq.⁸ So far, in the twenty-first century, only the military operations meant to rout out Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan shortly after the September 11 attacks met with significant initial support from the American public.⁹

What changed between the end of the Vietnam War and these late twentieth and early twenty-first century conflicts was American perceptions and treatment of those who served in them. Those who participated in the Persian Gulf War sixteen years after the fall of Saigon received support for their service independent of the citizenry’s opinion of the war. Americans tied yellow ribbons around trees to signify support for military service members stationed in the Middle East, although some used them as a sign of

Thomas E. Ricks, *Fiasco: The American Military Adventure in Iraq, 2003-2005* (New York: Penguin Press, 2006).

⁶ Monte Reel and Manny Fernandez, “Anti-War Protest Largest Since ‘60s; Organizers Say 100,000 Turned Out,” *Washington Post*, October 27, 2002. Discussions of the Iraq War include Terry H. Anderson, *Bush’s Wars* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), Thomas Ricks, *Fiasco: The American Military Adventure in Iraq* (New York: Penguin Press, 2006), and Bob Woodward, *Plan of Attack: The Definitive Account of the Decision to Invade Iraq* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2004).

⁷ Craig R. Whitney, “Watching Iraq, Seeing Vietnam,” *New York Times*, November 9, 2003.

⁸ Debra Galant, “A Passion for Peace, Forged in War: A Wounded Vietnam Veteran Looks Wearily Toward Iraq,” *New York Times*, March 2, 2003 illustrates one of the stories printed regarding Vietnam soldiers. The article regarding one journalist’s trip to Vietnam is Kurt Anderson, “The Disquieted American: Traveling through Vietnam, I Saw All that We Ought to Fear about the War in Iraq – and All We Have to Hope For,” *The New York Times*, April 13, 2003.

⁹ Good discussions of the war in Afghanistan after the September 11 attacks include Terry H. Anderson, *Bush’s Wars* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011) and Seth G. Jones, *In the Graveyard of Empires: America’s War in Afghanistan* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2010).

protest that meant they wanted the military personnel sent home.¹⁰ When Operation Desert Storm ended, Americans welcomed returning troops with parades and pats on the back. In the spring of 1991, the city of New York held a public parade to ensure that returning veterans felt revered and appreciated.¹¹

The same reverence and appreciation holds true today. In airports across the country, men and women either leaving for service or returning from tours of duty receive handshakes, thank-yous, and pats on the back. Most Americans consider military service an honorable role, regardless of their political persuasion, and they provide immense charity to assist disabled veterans and returning soldiers with post-traumatic stress disorder. They help build and remodel houses for them, and there are significant efforts to employ them.¹² This current treatment in many ways resulted from calculated efforts in the 1970s and 1980s to change how the public viewed and treated Vietnam veterans.

Vietnam continues to shape how some politicians and their constituents view interventions and war. It made them skittish about the use of American military power that until the 1960s seemed charmed and unstoppable. However, while the United States

¹⁰ A poll conducted by the *Chicago Tribune* found that 46% of those asked admitted to buying a yellow ribbon to support those fighting in the Gulf War. Peter Kendall, "Unflagging Retail Patriotism: Majority in Survey Favor Goods that Support the Troops," *Chicago Tribune*, February 22, 1991.

¹¹ Alessandra Stanley, "New York Prepares Embrace for Troops," *The New York Times*, June 10, 1991.

¹² On August 5, 2011, President Barack Obama announced significant commitments by "Humana, Veterans on Wall Street, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, Edison Electric Institute, Microsoft, AT&T, Hewlett-Packard, Accenture, Walmart, Lockheed Martin, Honeywell, Code for America, SCORE, Futures, Inc. and Siemens who have committed to hire or provide training to unemployed veterans." "Fact Sheet: President Obama's Commitment to Employing America's Veterans," Office of Press Secretary Release, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/08/05/fact-sheet-president-obama-s-commitment-employing-america-s-veterans>.

continues the process of learning to live with the consequences of a war that affected its international power and its mythological understanding of itself, Americans' perceive military service itself in a very different way. The act of serving the United States elevates men's masculinity and indicates nobility, regardless of whether or not one sees combat. The military tradition remains intact and many use its long, evolving history to prove American power.

Although the use of military force continues to be a point of contention in any American foreign policy situation, as seen with the Iraq War, dissent or fear of a quagmire does not stop the government from entering into conflict if the government wants it. For conservatives whose principles include a belief in the superiority of the United States, that shining city on a hill, the loss in Vietnam led them on a specific journey.

While attempting to convince a wary public of the importance of military tradition in the wake of the Vietnam War, they not only persuaded them, they also gained an adherence to that tradition and the military service that drives it, removing the need to break down the Vietnam Syndrome. Solidifying the narrative of nobility in warfare re-indoctrinated much of the American public into an acceptance of a culture of militarism that provides enough nationalistic and martial manpower to override dissent.

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